

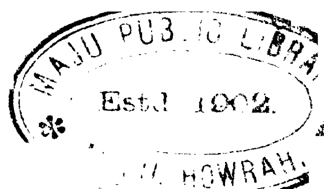
" He knew that he was looking upon the most beautiful woman he had ever met."

"THE LEAGUE OF TWELVE." (CHAPTER I.)

(*Frontispiece.*)

Bell's Indian and Colonial Library

THE LEAGUE OF TWELVE



THE LEAGUE OF TWELVE

BY

GUY BOOTHBY

AUTHOR OF 'DR. NIKOLA,' 'THE BEAUTIFUL WHITE DEVIL,' 'THE CURSE OF THE SNAKE,' 'THE MYSTERY OF THE CLASPED HANDS,' 'MY INDIAN QUEEN,' 'A MILLIONAIRE'S LOVE STORY,' 'THE COUNTESS LONDA,' ETC.

WITH FRONTISPIECE BY

E. FAIRHURST



LONDON

GEORGE BELL AND SONS

1903

This Edition is issued for circulation in India and the Colonies only

THE LEAGUE OF TWELVE

CHAPTER I

THAT fascinating but little-known town of Great Brackford was all agog with excitement. And yet it was not the time of the Assizes, nor was it market-day; it was not even Petty Sessions, Mayor's Court, or Bank Holiday. The marriage of Alderman Gustave's daughter, to the eldest son of Mr. Councillor Crimp, baker, had certainly taken place that morning, but it must be confessed that the *furore* in question was not to be in any way attributed to that momentous event. There had also been a small fire on the outskirts of the town, in which a drunken farm-labourer had come within an ace of losing his life, but Mr. Hidd, the chemist, who had been twice Mayor, and who, so far as gossip was concerned, was as well informed as his neighbours, would promptly have told you that the conflagration to which I have referred was, so far as the present

situation was concerned, of no account whatsoever.

But when old Mrs. Gabbage, who keeps the sweetstuff-shop at the corner of the High Street, than whom there is no one keener on imparting news, went so far out of her way as to leave her shop on a Saturday afternoon in order to call upon Mr. Williams, head of the firm of Williams and Tomkins, grocers and tea merchants, five doors away, it became quite evident that the news, whatever it might be, was of more than usual importance.

'Good afternoon to 'ee, Mrs. Gabbage,' said the worthy grocer and Mayor of the town as, attired in his white apron and with shirt-sleeves rolled above the elbow, he filled the doorway of his shop. 'A fine day for the time of year.'

'A fine day indeed,' the lady replied.

Having answered his assurance that the weather was all that it should be, and having found that he had no complaint to make against the Clerk who is popularly supposed to control it, she cast furtive glances at him in the hope of discovering whether he had already heard the tidings she had come out of her way to impart.

I have frequently observed that your true

retailer of news never makes the mistake of beginning at the real point of interest. He prefers to lead up to it gradually, whetting his audiences' appetites with hints of the good things that are to come.

'Yes, yes, it's wonderful weather for this time of year; let's hope it will hold out for the Fair. A wet Fair is no Fair, as they say, and I am sure I can well believe it. I am no holder with Fairs myself, though I am sure we all want something to cheer us up.' She had passed the first stage, and was now approaching the second. 'I am sure I don't know when trade has been so slack. If there were a few more rich folk about, it would be better for the town.'

She threw another furtive glance at his worship's face. That roseate countenance, however, was as expressionless as one of his own cheeses. If he had heard the news, it had evidently made no impression upon him. The gleam in her eyes was sufficient evidence of her satisfaction. She was now at liberty to come to her third, and last, point.

'To my thinking,' she continued, 'there is nothing so good for a town as the houses of a few big gentlefolk.'

'I'm of the same way of thinking,' said the

worthy Mayor. 'It's a pity we are not better blessed in that direction.'

At that moment young Mr. Migson, the saddler from across the street, left his shop and joined them. Experience had probably taught him that, when the lady deserted her counter on a Saturday afternoon, just at the time when the school children had their pennies to spend, there was something more than ordinary in the wind. They exchanged courtesies, after which the lady returned to the subject she had been exploiting with so much ingenuity. She could have wished that Mr. Migson had heard her prologue, but since he had not, she was not prepared to postpone the climax any longer.

'Mr. Williams,' she said, 'I've got a piece of news for you. And it concerns what we've just been talking about.'

'Does it now?' said the gentleman she addressed. 'And may I be so bold as to ask what your news is?'

She folded her arms, and gazed at him triumphantly through her spectacles.

'What would you say,' she began, 'if I were to tell you that the Castle is let?'

She threw her funny little head upon one side, and glanced at his worship the Mayor, as

much as to say: 'What do you think of that for a piece of news now?'

The chief magistrate, however, only rolled his head, until his cheeks shook like blanc-mange.

'I could have told you that this morning,' he said, with a sly chuckle. 'I had a twenty-pound order from the new housekeeper, so it is likely that I should know something about it.'

The poor lady could scarcely conceal her humiliation—or her disappointment. I don't think she knew until that moment how intensely she disliked the man before.

'What's more,' said Mr. Migson, 'I have had instructions by this morning's post to fit out the stables with all the necessaries, and there's no saying but that that will run into a pretty penny. The new tenant intends to do it well, and no mistake about it, for all he's a foreigner.'

'I don't hold with foreigners myself,' interposed the lady snappishly.

'You would if you had a twenty-pound order from them,' retorted his worship. 'As long as I knew that the money was good, I'd serve a heathen Turk, let alone a Frenchman. Bless my soul, where'd we be if it weren't for our trade with foreign nations?'

The worthy grocer made this observation with such a magisterial air that the lady of the sweet-shop was too much impressed to be able to reply. She accordingly bade the two gentlemen farewell, and returned to her own place of business. To soothe her ruffled feelings, on arrival there she administered to her assistant such a lecture on the sins of over-inquisitiveness and gossip as sufficed to put that poor young person into such a fit of nervousness that for a time she could scarcely tell the difference between butter-scotch and chocolate-cream. Unfortunately for the moral, however, she desired to instil, she had scarcely reached the end of her harangue before the sound of horse-hoofs in the street outside attracted her attention. A tall young man, mounted on a sporting-looking cob, had pulled up beside the pavement, and was in the act of dismounting. Moreover, his action was being watched by three small children with the deepest interest. When he had alighted he attached his reins to the bridle-post—for Great Brackford was conservative enough to have retained this useful article—and then entered the shop, followed by the youngsters. He was a tall, pleasant-looking young fellow, and, as Miss Cratchley, who played the organ in

the village church and who wrote milk-and-water poetry for the Brackford *Guardian*, was wont to declare, 'he was a typical Englishman.' If a typical Englishman should stand six feet two in his stockings, should possess a pair of shoulders that made you think you would rather be friends with him than fight him, and honest blue eyes that looked into yours at all times without wavering, then he was certainly what she described him to be. If conspicuous mental qualifications are required, I am not quite so sure that he would be able to fill the bill; on the other hand—and what he would have considered a good deal more to the point—he was an undeniable horseman, a first-class shot, and one of the best judges of cattle in the county. In the days of his prosperity, that is to say, before his father invested the whole of his fortune in a mine with a high-sounding title and a marvellous prospectus situated in South America, and in so doing lost his all, some one had advised young Jack Trowbridge to try for Parliament, at the same time assuring him that he would certainly be elected if he would consent to stand for his native town.

'Great Scott!' was his remark. 'And what should I do if I got to Westminster? I should

never make a speech, and as for understanding all the bills and things they talk about, why, I should know as much about it as I do of Egyptian hieroglyphics!'

In consequence he had done nothing, but had lived on at Great Brackford, first at his old home, Streffon Castle, and, when he could no longer afford to keep the place up, in a small house, half villa, half farm, a mile or so nearer the town. His mother and father being both dead, his sister Dorothea, generally known as Dot, kept house for him, and, from personal experience, I am in a position to avow that a more comfortable abiding-place than theirs was not to be found from Land's End to John o' Groat's. Between them they possessed exactly two thousand pounds a year, which was now about to be materially added to, since a tenant had been secured for the Castle. Small wonder was it, therefore, that Jack Trowbridge thought himself entitled to stand treat to the children who had followed him into the shop.

'Good afternoon, Mr. Jack,' said the lady of the shop, sweeping the spotless counter with her apron as she spoke. 'I thought you must be away, as I haven't seen you for this week past.'

'Not a bit of it,' the young man replied. 'I 've been too busy to get away.'

The old lady knew this, and her object in remarking upon his absence had only been to draw the young man on. If he had not spoken to any one else in the town she might be even with his worship the Mayor after all. To have heard all about it from the young squire's lips would be to place herself in an unassailable position. She shook her head gravely.

'Ah, sir,' she said, 'you must not work too hard. But, there, I suppose the lettin' of a big place like the Castle isn't to be done in a day.'

'In these times there is very little that can be done in a day,' the other replied, 'unless it is breaking your neck hunting, or something of that sort.'

'Lor' bless my soul, sir, you shouldn't talk like that,' said the old lady. Then, having no intention of letting him slip, she continued: 'Especially when you 're going to make such a mint of money, as they do say as you 've let the Castle for.'

She watched him out of the corner of her eye in the hopes that he would commit himself. He was too sharp to do so, however.

'I'm glad they think I'm making a good thing out of it,' he answered. 'But what am I doing? I'm forgetting my hospitality to these young people.'

So saying he turned to the children, who were staring at the bottles upon the shelves and counter with impatient eyes, and invited them to name their fancies. Their wants having been more than satisfied, they left the shop, and he prepared to follow suit. The old lady, however, had even now not given up all hopes. She could see that there was not much time left to her; she therefore resolved to make the most of it. She felt that it would be too bad altogether to let such an opportunity slip.

'You'll excuse the liberty I'm taking, sir,' she said, 'but I heard this morning as how 'twas a foreign gentleman as you have let the Castle to. Might I be so bold as to ask if that is right?'

'You may ask if you like,' the other replied, 'but whether or not I can give you a definite answer is quite another matter. Monsieur d'Alvaro, I am given to understand, is of Franco-Portuguese-Spanish extraction on his father's side. His mother was a Pole, and he himself has passed the greater part of his life

in South America. I am afraid, therefore, you will find it rather a difficult matter to describe his nationality.'

Mrs. Gabbage remarked that she certainly would, and, when he had paid for the sweets he had purchased, he bade her good afternoon and left the shop, rather pleased with himself upon the manner in which he had battled with her curiosity. He was not aware, that, after he had mounted his horse, she once more warned her assistant against the great sin of over-curiosity.

As the young squire, for by this title he was known throughout the district, rode slowly down the street, caps were touched to him on every side, but folk missed his customary cheery greeting. It was not often that he was in a very serious mood, but, strange to say, that was his condition on this particular afternoon. The truth was that, while he was glad to have let the Castle to a good tenant, and by no means sorry to have added a thousand pounds a year to his income, he did not altogether like the idea of strangers occupying the house that had been the home of his forefathers for so many generations.

'It's a strange thing,' he said to himself, 'but I never knew how fond I was of the

place until I came to let it. If only the poor old governor had not thrown his money away in that rascally mine, Dot and I might be there now. However, it's no good crying over spilt milk. We are happy enough as it is, and I suppose we ought to think ourselves lucky to have the mother's money if not the other.'

Being something of a philosopher in his way he did not allow himself to be long disturbed by these dreary reflections, but, remembering that he had promised to endeavour to obtain a new book for his sister at the railway station, he touched up his horse and rode thither at an increased speed.

Now, as all the world knows, or should know, the station at Great Brackford has the misfortune to be situated a mile or so outside the town. As the inhabitants, however, would probably inform you, Great Brackford was a town long before railways were invented, and that the railway came to it, and not it to the railway. As a matter of fact, however, the only people who did not grumble at the distance of the station from the town were the cabmen, and I have heard it said, with what truth I know not, that they earned more money over that mile in two days than they did in the town in the other five. Be that

as it may, however, it has nothing to do with John Trowbridge's visit that afternoon.

On reaching the station he dismounted and placed the reins of his horse in the hand of a sleepy-looking individual in porter's uniform, and strolled on to the platform. It was a lovely afternoon, and one on which it was very pleasant to be abroad. The long metals stretching away to right and left shone like bars of silver in the sunlight, while the wealth of flowers in the stationmaster's garden across the track made up a show of colour that almost dazzled the eye. Nodding to the stationmaster he made his way to the bookstall and made inquiries concerning the book he had been instructed to procure. He purchased it and paid for it, slipped it into his pocket, and was about to proceed towards the main entrance when he encountered an old friend named Beverill, the M.F.H. of the district.

'Hullo, Jack, old man!' said the latter, holding out his hand to the other; 'you 're the very man I wanted to see. They tell me you have let the Castle. Who 's the new tenant? What sort of fellow is he, and does he hunt?'

'One question at a time, my dear fellow,' said Trowbridge; 'you want too much for your money. At the present I can tell you

nothing about my new tenant, except that his name is D'Alvaro; that he has plenty of money; and that he hails from South America —Brazil, I believe. So far, I haven't set eyes on him, but the people who have worked the business for me describe him as being very agreeable and the sort of man who is likely to make a good tenant. More than that I dare not hope for.'

'It sounds all right,' returned the other. 'Let us trust he will turn out all your fancy paints. Is he a married man?'

'That again is more than I can tell you,' said Trowbridge. 'The Castle would be a lonely sort of barrack for a bachelor. However, as he is to take possession to-day or to-morrow, I dare say we shall soon know all about him. He may be there now for all I know to the contrary.'

After that the conversation between the two men drifted to matters of more immediate interest—the chit-chat of the neighbourhood, a new horse which the M.F.H. had heard of during the previous week, and the prospects of the approaching shooting season. After they had been talking some little time it struck Jack to ask his friend the reason for his presence at the station.

'I have come to meet the wife,' the other replied. 'She 's been up in town shopping, spending a lot of money, I expect, that would have been better laid out on horses, and generally enjoying herself. I said I 'd drive in to meet her, hence my presence here. You 'd better stay and keep me company, and I 'll drop you on the way home.'

'Thanks very much,' said Jack, 'but I 've got the cob outside. Nevertheless, I 'll stay and see Mrs. Beverill with pleasure. We haven't met since the Colebridge's garden-party. How long is it before the express is due?'

'She should be in in a few minutes,' returned the other. 'What do you say to a stroll up the platform and back before she puts in an appearance?'

Jack agreed, and for upwards of five minutes they paced up and down with the regularity of a soldier on sentry-go. Then the warning bell sounded in the signal-box at the end of the platform, announcing that the train had passed through the last station before Great Brackford.

'She won't be long now,' said Beverill, throwing away his cigar. 'Let 's hope the missus is not going to fill up the dogcart with parcels.'



'The penalty of being a married man,' said Trowbridge, with a laugh. 'If you must marry the prettiest woman in the county you should be prepared to pay something for the privilege.'

'Privilege be hanged!' the other replied. 'You do not know what it is to have a bonnet-box between your feet which you are not to tread upon on pain of instant death, a parcel about three feet long and weighing about a dozen pounds propped against the splash-board, half a sack of toys for the kids under the seat, and your groom clutching a toy elephant nearly as big as the genuine article behind. You'll meet your fate before long, my dear Jack, and when you do, think of what I am saying to you now.'

'When I do, I promise you I'll do that,' Jack replied. 'The sort of lady, however, that I am in search of has not yet come in sight. When she does I'll let you know.'

'Let's hope that she will be somewhat different to poor old Dick Thornton's wife, who scarcely knows a horse from a camel, and who boasts that she has never sat in a saddle in her life. A woman like that would drive me to my grave in a month.'

'You should have married a blue-stocking,

Senior Wrangler, or something of that, then you would have been compelled to sell the kennels and the gees, and endow a college with the proceeds.'

'Endow a lunatic asylum, you mean! But, steady, here is the train.'

As he spoke the train came into view with all the importance of an express that only stopped three times all the way out from London. With much grunting of brakes it drew up at the platform, and Beverill went off in search of his wife. Trowbridge strolled leisurely after him, scanning the faces of the different passengers as he went. Half-way along the train he came upon a reserved carriage from which a lady and gentleman were in the act of alighting. Without paying very much attention to the man, who was standing upon the footboard, he noticed that he was tall, and also that he was the possessor of a close-clipped black beard. Taken altogether, he looked like a gentleman, though scarcely English. When he had alighted he turned to give his hand to the lady. Trowbridge was almost immediately opposite the carriage at the time and only a few feet from it. From the man his glance turned to the lady, and as it did so he knew that he was looking upon

the most beautiful woman he had ever met in his life.

I endeavoured, only a few months ago, to induce him to describe her to me as he saw her then. He declared, however, that it would be impossible for him to do so with any minuteness. I 'll set down his own words, and they must speak for themselves.

'From the glimpse I had of her,' he said, 'I could not give you the faintest notion of what she was like. All I do know is that I was there and then struck all of a heap, as the saying goes. I 've seen lots of beautiful women in my time, of course; this lady, however, eclipsed all I had ever seen or dreamt of. She merely looked at me, and, egad! the deed was done. Fellows can laugh at love at first sight as much as they please, I don't mind admitting that I 've done so myself; but if I didn't fall head over heels in love in that flash, you can call me anything you please, and I 'll bear it meekly.'

It is not often that you can get men to commit themselves so completely, but I am perfectly sure in this case that Jack Trowbridge was in earnest. Why I am so assured, you will know when you have read this story.

Having no excuse for loitering near the

carriage, from which the man was now abstracting some small luggage, which consisted of a lady's travelling-bag, what looked like a despatch-box, and a roll of umbrellas, walking-sticks, and parasols, Trowbridge strolled on to greet Mrs. Beverill.

'What is the matter, old man?' asked Beverill, when Jack had shaken hands with the lady. 'You look as though you had had a fright.'

'Not a bit of it,' answered Trowbridge, 'but I know what I have seen, and that is the most beautiful woman, saving your presence, Mrs. Beverill, that ever set foot on this earth.'

'To use my husband's favourite expression, that's rather a large order, isn't it?' said the lady, with a little laugh. 'Who is she?'

'I haven't the least idea,' Trowbridge returned. 'But I must say that I should like to find out. If they are going to stay in the neighbourhood, however, we shall know everything in good time, I have no doubt.'

He walked with his friends to the dogcart, helped Mrs. Beverill to her seat, and assisted in stowing away the numerous packages, against which the M.F.H. had uttered his anathemas. When they had driven off he made his way to the spot where his horse was

standing. He had rewarded the man who had held him, and was about to mount, when he espied, coming through the doorway of the station, the lady and gentleman who had so excited his curiosity. They entered a cab together, and, having expressed their thanks to the stationmaster, who had accompanied them, drove off.

'Perkins will doubtless be able to tell me who they are,' said the young man to himself, and walked towards the railway official.

'Who are those people, Perkins?' Trowbridge inquired. 'I don't remember having seen them before.'

'I'm surprised at that,' the stationmaster replied. 'I thought probably you would have known the gentleman.'

'What made you think that?'

'Because he is your tenant, sir. He's the foreign gentleman who has taken the Castle.'

John Trowbridge, of the Croft, occupied himself during the ride home that evening with what he considered a very momentous question.

'If he's D'Alvaro, who is she?' he said to himself. 'His daughter or his wife?'

CHAPTER II

I HAVE already given you my opinion of the Croft, the residence of Jack Trowbridge and his sister. I now repeat what I have said—namely, that a more delightful little place could not be discovered between Land's End and John o' Groat's. I am quite aware that this is rather a big assertion to make, nevertheless I utter it with a due sense of the responsibility attached to it. It forms part of the famous Trowbridge estate, and I am inclined to believe that it was once used as the Dower House of the family. It was not as old as the Castle, and, of course, not a quarter the size; but for comfort there is, to my thinking, no comparison between the two. I will give you a description of the Castle in due course; the Croft, however, must come first.

When you leave Great Brackford behind you, you proceed along the station highroad—on this particular afternoon inches deep in

white dust—and pass through the little village of Melton-Deney. You will find nothing of very great interest there, unless you choose to explore the old church, where lie some two or three dozen Trowbridges, the earliest of whom is represented in stone, his legs crossed and his Crusader's shield upon his breast. After you have passed the church you cross the old stone bridge, erected, so the inscription on one of the buttresses tells you, in the year 1652, by a certain Cuthbert Trowbridge, Baronet. I am not well acquainted with the history of the family, so I am not able to tell you why the baronetcy lapsed; but, apart from this stone, there is distinct evidence to prove that, up to the end of the seventeenth century, the title was enjoyed by the family. From the bridge in question to the Croft it is something like a mile and a half, and as pleasant going for a footman, horseman, or cyclist—to say nothing of the inevitable motor-car—as you will find on any highroad in England. Here you pass through a cutting with a wood on either side, in which the pigeons coo and the squirrels make merry through the long summer's day; after that comes an open stretch of down, where the sward is so elastic that you feel as if you could walk upon it for

ever without becoming tired; then the old brick wall of my Lord Delavere's park (which, unfortunately for him, the road cuts in half), the trees of which make a delightful avenue in summer, but which render it very damp in winter. Then, lest you should become weary of trees and downs, you are treated to something like three-quarters of a mile of luscious meadows, on the further side of which runs a stream where, I give you my word, are the finest trout in all the county. Do I not speak as one with authority, for I have tried them. After the meadows the road takes an abrupt turn to the right, and a hundred yards past the finger-post you find yourself before the white gates of the Croft.

If you are privileged to enter those pleasant portals you will follow a drive, with the shrubbery on either hand, for about eighty yards, and then you will be confronted with a long, straggling building, the front of which at this particular time of the year might almost be described as a mass of roses. It consists of only two storeys; it has a curious old red-tiled roof, with massive chimneys, which were evidently built to stand the wear and tear of time, and to admit the passage of a sweep. In front of the house is a lawn—large enough to take

a couple of tennis-courts; beyond the lawn is a ha-ha, then a parklike paddock, and the meadows again. The stables lie to the right and some little distance from the house. Miss Trowbridge's dairy, of which she was not a little proud, is approached through the shrubbery, above which its quaint Swiss roof shows with most picturesque effect.

The interior of the house was, if possible, even more delightful than the outside. Miss Dot, as she was almost universally called, was a true woman in her liking for pretty things, and her taste was undeniable, as even her worst enemy, had she one, would have been compelled to admit. Now, when you have a pleasant little income wherewith to buy pretty things, friends by the dozen who are only too anxious to be allowed to give them to you, a beautiful old house in which to place them when you have got them—well, I think it must be admitted that it would not be so difficult, after all, to make a home perfect, so far as its internal arrangements are concerned. But Miss Dot did more than that: she had her pretty knick-knacks about her—but they would have been as nothing without the sunshine of her own beautiful presence. She had all her brother's sunny temperament, and her

time was spent in endeavouring to make others as happy as herself. In consequence she was beloved from Great Brackford on the one side to Chilton Marsh on the other. The man who would have dared to be rude to, or to speak ill of, Miss Trowbridge, would, I fancy, have stood a very fair chance of being lynched in that neighbourhood. And yet it must be admitted that there were times when the young lady in question could, and did, speak her mind plainly and to the point. On one occasion—and I don't think her brother will ever allow her to forget it—she discovered a free and independent son of the soil, who was suspected of being a poacher, and who was known to spend the greater part of his time at a small beer-shop, known as the Hen and Chickens, engaged in the congenial work of beating his wife. The poor woman's cries for mercy, and the language with which her husband accompanied the blows, in all probability drowned the sound of her approach. She took in the scene at a glance, and, instead of running out to seek assistance or of falling upon the floor in a dead faint, as some young ladies might have done, she advanced upon the ruffian from behind, and, before he had time to recover from his astonishment, treated

him to half-a-dozen such cuts with her hunting-crop as he had not felt for many a long day. The fellow ceased thrashing his wife, and turned upon his assailant, doubtless anticipating a battle of the most gorgeous description. His jaw dropped when he beheld the squire's sister.

'You scoundrel!' she cried, scarcely able to speak for rage. 'You inhuman monster! How dare you treat your wife in this fashion? I have a good mind to beat you until you are black and blue.'

So threatening was her demeanour that the culprit stepped back a few feet, quite believing that she was about to carry out her threat.

'I'll tell my brother, and you shall go to gaol,' said Dot, warming to her subject. 'Go out of the house, and leave me to attend to your wife. You'll hear more of this anon.'

Only too glad to escape, the man did as he was ordered, muttering something to the effect that 'things was coming to a pretty pass now, when a man couldn't larrup his own wife without being meddled with by other people.'

As a matter of fact he did not go to gaol, but on the morrow he received such a talking-to by the squire that he felt constrained to mend his ways. But to this day he admits

that he would rather be called over the coals by the gentleman than stand before the latter's sister when she was really in fighting form.

But in giving you this sketch, which, in some slight fashion, may enable you to judge something of Miss Dot's character, I am wandering from the point, and must now get back to my story.

The last time we saw the squire he was making his way home from Great Brackford railway station, overwhelmed by the fact that the lady and gentleman he had just seen alighting from the train were none other than his new tenants at the Castle. He had also amused himself wondering in what relationship the lady stood to her companion. Was she his wife or his daughter? The man might be forty-five, possibly not quite so old; the lady, on the other hand, could not have been more than twenty-two at the highest calculation. As far as his own feelings were concerned, Jack felt that this was a matter which would have to be cleared up with as little delay as possible.

'And yet how stupid I am, to be sure,' he said to himself as he jogged along. 'What can it matter to me either one way or the other? I've seen too much of the world to

be knocked into a cocked-hat by a pretty face. In all probability she's his wife, and they are a most devoted and happy couple, who will be very glad to ask us to lunch, and to lunch or dine with us in return. That's about all it amounts to.'

Then this inconsistent young man heaved a heavy sigh, and, addressing his cob, said, 'Come on, old man, it's getting late. I shall be in disgrace if I am not home in time for dinner.'

A quarter of an hour later he gave up his horse in the stable-yard, made some inquiries regarding a dog that had received some slight injury that morning, and then made his way to the house. As it turned out, he was in plenty of time, for his sister had not gone in to dress, but was in her rose-garden, with scissors in her hand and a basket on her arm, busily engaged in removing dead buds from her beloved trees. She looked up as her brother approached her, and I can assure you that no fairer picture could have been found.

'For once you are really home in time,' she said, with a laugh.

'I thought I should have been late,' he answered, stooping to pat a terrier who had at that moment run up. 'They have been

trying to pump me in the town concerning the new tenant at the Castle.'

'It's certain to be a nine days' wonder,' she replied. 'I suppose you haven't heard when they are to come in?'

'I can tell you more than that,' Jack replied. 'They are in.'

'In?' said Dorothy, with surprise. 'I was not aware that they would arrive so soon. Where did you hear that?'

'I did not hear it, I saw them.'

Dot immediately put down her basket and joined her brother in the path.

'Most interesting of brothers,' she said; 'pray let me hear all about it. Where did you see them, and how did you know them? What are they like? How many of them are there, and do you think we shall like them?'

'Good gracious, Dot,' said her brother, who was lighting a cigarette, 'you're as bad as old Beverill. He asked I don't know how many questions, and seemed disgusted because I couldn't tell him all he wanted to know.'

'All Mrs. Beverill wanted to know, I suppose,' said Dot, with a quiet smile.

'Nothing of the sort,' her brother answered. 'The questions were put to me by the Master of the Foxhounds and concerned the lines the

newcomer would take—whether he would subscribe liberally, and whether he intends to hunt. You may be quite sure old Beverill will not miss the main chance.'

'You men are such money-grubbers,' said Dot, with supreme disdain. 'You seem to think of nothing but the main chance.'

'If you had to run a pack of hounds on a limited income in a district like this, as Beverill has,' said her brother, 'I fancy you would keep a sharp eye on the main chance; more especially when you've got such a family depending on you as Beverill has. That eldest boy of his at Eton——'

'Dear old Jack,' said Dorothy, 'you are wandering off the path. I have no desire to discuss Master Humphrey Beverill. I want to know about our tenants. Now, I happen to remember that Mrs. Beverill told me that she was going up to town shopping to-day. As a matter of fact she wanted me to accompany her, and I should have done so had I not promised to go over to Marsh Farm to see poor Mrs. Briggs. On my way back Mr. Beverill passed me in his dogcart. He was going to meet his wife, he informed me. I presume, therefore, that the newcomers travelled down in the same train as Mrs.

Beverill, and that you saw them at the railway station. You see I can put two and two together, if you can't. Now, tell me what they are like.'

'Well,' said Jack, picking the terrier up as he spoke and stroking his well-shaped head, 'the man is not a bad-looking fellow. He is tall and well made. He looks like a foreigner, and I should say is a gentleman. I don't know, as far as appearance goes, that you will be able to find any fault with him.'

'So much for the man,' she replied; 'and now about his companion.'

'How do you know that there is a companion?'

'Because you said "*they*." Come, come, Jack, why don't you answer? You are most exasperating. You must know that I am anxious to hear all I can about them. What is the lady like?'

'How do you know it's a lady?' her brother answered.

'Because if it had been a man you would have had no hesitation in answering me,' she replied. 'What is more, she must be pretty, and for the same reason. You see, I know you better than you know yourself.'

'You are wonderfully clever,' he returned.

'Strange to say, you have hit the mark this time. Mrs. d'Alvaro, Miss, or whatever else she may be, is one of the most beautiful women I have ever seen in my life. I will go even further than that and say *the* most beautiful woman.'

'This is most interesting,' said his sister. 'It is like the commencement of a novel. It is evident, moreover, that she has attracted you. Is she English or foreign?'

'Foreign, I should say. I've been wondering ever since I saw her whether she's his sister or not. When do you think you will call upon them?'

Dot looked searchingly into her brother's face before she replied. As a rule he did not often interest himself regarding matters of social interest.

'We must give them time to settle in,' she said. 'You may be sure they won't be anxious to see visitors just yet.'

'But we are not exactly visitors,' said Jack. 'I'm his landlord, and it would be only fair that you should find out whether there is anything else they would like done. When one secures a good tenant it is always as well to do the best one can for them.'

'But you can do that with a note,' Dot

answered with composure. 'Besides, after the amount of money that has been laid out on it lately we know that the Castle must be in as good order as is necessary for a yearly tenant. Mr. Thomson gave us his assurance that there was nothing else that wanted seeing to.'

'Thomson is a fool,' said Jack pettishly. 'He did not speak about the drainage in those pointer kennels, and I can assure you I have my doubts about it.'

'The drainage in the pointer kennels will not interfere with Monsieur d'Alvaro's comfort,' said his sister. 'You need not worry yourself on that score.'

'Very well,' said Jack, 'if we lose our tenant after the first year, and have the place on our hands again, don't blame me. Now I am going in to change my things.'

So saying, he left her and made his way into the house, the terrier trotting meekly at his heels.'

'I shall drive over and see this lady,' said Dot to herself when he disappeared. 'The girl who can make Jack anxious about another man's pointer kennels must be worth considering.'

Then she followed her brother into the house, wondering what this new state of things might

mean. As may be inferred from what I have already written, she was the possessor of a remarkably clear brain, and was able to put two and two together, as she had informed her brother, somewhat better than her neighbours.

When Jack went to his room to dress for dinner, I am sadly afraid he did not do so in a very good temper. He was angry for having made what he termed 'a fool of himself.' He knew that he had not acted wisely, and told himself that he should have known that women look at things differently to men. As was his custom when he was annoyed he brushed his hair with extraordinary vigour, and then made his way downstairs in a frame of mind that could only be likened to that of a whipped schoolboy. He felt almost sorry that he had gone into the town that afternoon, and more than all that he had let the Castle.

He had reached the foot of the stairs, and was in the act of entering his study, when his old butler, who had served his father before him, and who even now looked upon Master Jack as being little better than a schoolboy, approached him, and informed him that the Honourable James Ormby was in the drawing-room.

'Good man,' muttered Jack to himself, with

what was evident pleasure. 'He couldn't have called at a better time. Let's hope he will stay to dinner.'

He accordingly entered the room in question to find a tall, good-looking man of about thirty years of age, with a clean-shaven, humorous face, and sporting an eyeglass, standing before the fireplace, with his hands thrust deeply into his pockets. He was in evening dress, and it would have been plain to the least observant stranger that he was familiar with the custom of the house.

'My dear old Jim,' said Jack as they shook hands. 'This is more than kind of you. Since you come in this dress it is only right I should suppose that you will stay to dinner.'

'That's just what I am going to do,' the other replied. 'I've had a fit of the blues all day. I had to kill a colt this morning; you know the one I mean, that roan by Seaweed out of that Teastar mare. Thinking you would have me I decided to drive over and throw myself upon your hospitality.'

'I'm indeed sorry to hear about the colt,' said Jack. 'Nevertheless, I am very grateful to him for giving us the pleasure of seeing you. Now, if you don't think that a pretty speech you ought to. Dot will be down in a minute.'

Ormby shifted his feet uneasily as he heard this information. Between ourselves I will inform you that he had been paying more than ordinary attention to Miss Dot for years. Up to this time the little minx had managed to keep him at arm's length, but the task was a difficult one just then, seeing that he had found it necessary to consult her at least three times a week on various items connected with the bachelor establishment he kept up about three miles distant. That he had not succeeded in winning his lady was not altogether his fault; he was her humblest slave in every particular. It is my belief that if she told him to prostrate himself in a puddle in Great Brackford High Street in order that she might step over dry shod he would have done it, and with the greatest cheerfulness. He fetched and carried for her, attended her out hunting when her brother was too busily concerned with other affairs, cut out squares with her at the county ball, lost dozens of pairs of gloves to her at the Hunt Club Races, and conducted himself generally as gentlemen are wont to do when they are violently in love. He was the third son of the Earl of Castle Fergo, and to his credit, be it remarked, the only member of the present generation of that ancient family

who had not appeared either in the Bankruptcy or the Divorce Court. Taken altogether he was a good fellow, a sterling sportsman, perhaps not overburdened with brains, but one who did his duty by his fellow-man to the best of his ability.

'Jack, old man,' he said at last, 'I want to ask you about those people to whom you have let the Castle.'

'If you do I'll murder you on the spot,' his friend replied. 'Because I happen to have a place to let, and do let it, every one thinks he has the right to inquire about the tenants, their habits, and their intentions for the future. I can only repeat what I have said to everybody that the man seems a very decent sort of fellow, and that he has treated me very generously in the matter of the rent. That, of course, is as far as I am concerned in the matter.'

'Sorry I trod upon your toes, old chap,' said his friend. 'I am sure I had no intention of so doing. Like all the rest of them, however, I am a bit curious to know what sort of a man is going to follow you there.'

'He'll probably do a good deal more good than I ever did,' said Jack lugubriously, 'and it would have been sheer madness for Dot and

I to have attempted to carry the place on. No! all things considered, I am quite sure that it is best as it is.'

There was an awkward pause after this speech, during which Jack walked up and down the room, while his friend regarded his patent leather boots with quite unusual attention.

'Look here, Jack,' said the latter at last, 'there is something I want to say to you. I give you my word it is as important as anything can be to a man.'

'Is that so? Well, then, fire away.'

Jack had a very good idea of what was coming, though he did not say so.

'I'll tell you what it is,' said Ormby. 'You and I were at Eton together, and do you remember the time when I came down to stay with you?'

Jack nodded. He remembered the circumstances perfectly.

'Well, you know,' the young man continued, 'that was the first time I saw your sister. I fell in love with her on the spot.'

'You began early,' was his friend's only reply.

'Confound your silly joking!' answered the Honourable. 'You don't know how serious this matter is to me. I've been in love with her ever since.'

'So I have observed.'

'There's no girl in the world I'd as soon have for my wife, and if I could only believe that she likes me, I should be the happiest man on earth.'

'And what is it you want me to do?'

'I want you to tell me what you think about it. Whether you think I have a chance of winning her. Women are so difficult to understand. One moment you think they like you, and the next you are ready to take your oath that they think you are the stupidest fellow on the face of the earth.'

'My dear old fellow,' said Jack, 'I'd help you willingly enough if I could; but I am afraid it is not in my power. You see, a sister is one sort of person, and a girl is another. I'm afraid it isn't very clear, but I know exactly what I mean myself. If you want to find out the state of her feelings, why don't you ask her?'

Ormby looked at his friend with a startled expression on his face.

'My dear boy,' he said, 'you don't know what you are saying. Supposing she were to tell me that she didn't care a scrap about me, and that the sooner I went to the colonies—or to anywhere else—the better? What should I do then?'

'Why, do what she told you, I suppose.

Take my word for it, you won't know how you stand until you put the question to her yourself.'

Ormby's spirits sank on hearing this speech. It was all very well, he felt, to be advised to ask her; he had been trying to make up his mind to do this for the last couple of years. For some reason or another, however, he had always shirked it. He almost wished that he had not put in an appearance at the Croft that evening.

'At any rate, Jack,' he went on, 'may I assure myself that I have your best wishes for my success?'

'Of course you may. If I must have a brother I don't think there is any one else I should prefer to you. Indeed, I am quite sure there is not.'

'That is one point in my favour,' Ormby answered, and at that moment Miss Dot entered the room. She seemed surprised at seeing Ormby, but, recovering her composure, she bade him welcome, as if his unexpected appearance were the most natural thing in the world.

Five minutes later dinner was announced, and they passed into the dining-room. All things considered, the meal that evening could not be called an exciting one. Miss Dot was

silent, in all probability pondering over the problem her brother had set that afternoon. Ormby conducted himself like an amiable lunatic, dropping his dinner napkin and thanking himself for picking it up, and conducted himself generally as only men of his temperament do when they are under the spell of the Great Passion. After their wine the two men joined Miss Dot in the drawing-room, when she was good enough to favour them with some music. She had scarcely finished the first selection when the butler entered the room to inform his master that the village schoolmaster had called and desired to see him.

'Show him into the study,' said Jack, 'and I will be with him in a moment.'

A few seconds later he followed the servant to the room in question, and for upwards of half an hour was engaged in talking over the affairs of a certain cricket club, of which he was the captain. At last, when the schoolmaster had finished his glass of port and had taken his departure, he returned to the drawing-room to find that a change had taken place there. Miss Dot was seated at the piano, but it was easy to see that she had just resumed her place there. The Honourable James was standing at the fireplace pretending

to warm himself, and forgetting the fact that the grate contained nothing but ferns. Then Dot made an excuse and left the room, leaving Jack and his guest together.

'Well?' said the former, after glancing at his companion's face.

'My dear fellow, congratulate me,' cried his friend. 'I have followed your advice and she has accepted me. I am the most happy man in the world.'

'I congratulate you most heartily and myself, too,' said Jack. 'As I told you this evening I wouldn't wish for a better brother-in-law, and I'm sure you will make Dot a good husband.'

'Thanks,' returned the other. 'And now I'll be off if you will order my cart. Upon my word I don't know whether I am standing on my head or my heels. Either way, will you be at home to-morrow morning?'

'If you wish to see me I will make a point of being in. Will you name the time?'

'Will ten o'clock suit you?'

'Admirably. I shall expect you then.'

A quarter of an hour later the Honourable James was driving home, swearing to himself that, of all the men in England he was the happiest.

At ten o'clock next morning Trowbridge,

who had been to the water-meadows to note the progress of some new work, returned to the house to receive his visitor. To his surprise the latter had not put in an appearance. An hour went by and still there was no sign of him. At one o'clock he had not arrived, nor had he done so when the dinner-hour came round.

'I can't make out what it means,' said Jack to his sister, whose nervousness was increasing every minute. 'If he does not turn up to-night I will ride over in the morning to see what is up.'

'I should be so glad if you would,' his sister replied. 'I feel certain that something very serious has happened. Had he only met with an accident he would have sent a message, I am sure.'

At ten o'clock next morning Ormby had not put in an appearance. Jack accordingly set off on horseback to find out, if possible, the reason of his absence. When he reached the former's residence the housekeeper opened the door to him.

'Is Mr. Ormby at home?' he inquired.

'No, sir,' she replied. 'I can't make out what is the matter. I haven't set eyes on him since he left here the night before last to dine with you.'

CHAPTER III

Jack Trowbridge stared at the housekeeper, completely taken aback.

'What do you mean?' he inquired. 'Have you not seen Mr. Ormby since he left for my house the night before last?'

'That's it, sir,' the old lady replied. 'He drove away from here in his dogcart saying that he was going to dine with you. Williams, the groom, says that he left your house at a quarter to eleven. He was just driving up to the gates when a man stepped out into the road from the path and held up his hand. Mr. Ormby pulled up, then he got down and went away with the gentleman, and we've not seen nor heard anything of him since.'

'That's most extraordinary,' said Jack. 'Who on earth could the stranger have been? Have you made no inquiries?'

'Lor' bless you, sir, yes. We've sent up to the farm and down to the village, and Williams has been to the police-station, but we can't hear anything of him.'

'Do you think he caught the midnight train at Stoleby? The man may have brought him news that necessitated his going up to London at once.'

'You'll excuse me, sir,' said the old woman, 'but in that case he would have driven to the station, not walked. No, it's my belief that something foul has taken place.'

'Let's hope not. Besides, who would be likely to injure Mr. Ormby. He is as popular as any man in the neighbourhood.'

'Then, sir, why doesn't he come home? He must know how anxious we all are. Oh dear, oh dear! To think that I should ever live to see this day, me who nursed him when a babe in arms.'

'For Dot's sake I must take this matter up, and at once,' said Jack to himself. Then, aloud to the housekeeper, he added: 'Just let me see Williams, will you? I should like to put a few questions to him.'

'If you'll step into the master's smoking-room, I'll send one of the maids out for him. He's back from the village, I know, for I saw him ride by my window just as your bell sounded.

Jack followed her along the hall to the cosy little room at the end he knew so well. If the truth must be confessed he was more troubled

by the other's disappearance than he cared to admit. The whole affair seemed so inexplicable. Who was this mysterious stranger? He could not have been a well-known acquaintance, or Ormby would have invited him to the house. By the same reasoning he could not have been a mere beggar or the latter would not have descended from his cart and have walked away with him. He had known the missing man all his life, had been at school and college with him. He was not aware that he had made any enemies, or that he had any particularly undesirable acquaintances.

Presently Williams, the groom, put in an appearance. He was a dapper young fellow, a superb horseman, and had held his present position ever since his master had left the 'Varsity.

'Well, Williams,' said Jack, 'this is a very extraordinary affair. I don't know what to think of it.'

'Nor do I, sir,' Williams replied. 'When the housekeeper told me that Mr. Ormby was not at home at breakfast-time I give you my word, sir, that you could have knocked me down with a feather.'

'Tell me all you can about him,' Jack replied.

'There is not very much to tell, sir,' Williams

answered. 'After we left your house we drove straight home. When we were about fifty yards from the gate a man stepped out of the shadow of the hedge and held up his hand for Mr. Ormby to stop.'

'Just wait a moment,' Jack interposed. 'I take it that you were sitting behind?'

'That's quite right, sir, I was; but I had just turned round to see if the gate was open, and that's how I know.'

'Can you give me any idea what the stranger was like?'

'No, sir, I am sorry to say that I can't. All I noticed was that he was dressed in a long coat that came nearly down to his heels, and that he wore a felt hat.'

'I am afraid that won't be of much use to us. But we must do the best we can with it. Did he speak to Mr. Ormby?'

'Yes, sir, he said something very quiet. I didn't listen, so I couldn't tell you what it was.'

'What happened next?'

'Mr. Ormby told me to get down and lead the horse home. Then he jumped out. He would follow in a few minutes, he said.'

'In what direction did they walk?'

'The way we had come.'

'Then the station theory and the trip to

London won't hold water,' said Jack to himself. Then addressing Williams he continued: 'Have you seen any strange man hanging about here lately; or, in fact, any one suspicious?'

Williams shook his head. There had been one or two tramps, but no one resembling this mysterious stranger.

'You have made inquiries in the village, the housekeeper tells me, and have also communicated with the police?'

'Yes, sir, I went down there first thing this morning. I hope I did the right thing?'

'Quite. I shall now go on there and make further inquiries. If I were you I should keep a quiet tongue in my head and at the same time keep my eyes open.'

'You may be quite sure I shall do that, sir. I do hope nothing serious has happened to Mr. Ormby. I'd give a bit, sir, to know what it all means.'

'So would I,' said Jack. 'Now I'll be off to the police-station.'

He accordingly left the house and mounting his horse, turned its head in the direction of the village. The police-station was a very small affair, the force consisting of a sergeant and two men. Seeing Jack dismounting the

sergeant rose from his seat and saluted respectfully.

'Good afternoon, Giles,' said Jack. 'I have ridden over to have a few words with you regarding the disappearance of Mr. Ormby. His groom tells me he was down to see you this morning. Have you heard anything fresh since then?'

'No, sir,' the sergeant replied. 'I have got both my men out searching now, and they are sending me out extra assistance from the town. As soon as the tackle arrives we shall drag the river; though, for my own part, I am certain we shall not find anything there.'

'Unless there's been foul play,' said Jack. 'Doesn't that strike you as being possible?'

'Of course, sir, it's possible. Anything is possible in a case like this. But there's another way of looking at it. The groom says this stranger was a big man, well, so is Mr. Ormby. Then, again, if he anticipated any harm, do you think he would have gone off so quietly with him. No, sir, the theory I formed is that the man who called him out of the trap is somebody he was somewhat ashamed of and didn't want to be seen with. If he went to the village station he would have been recognised, so they walked into Brackford together, and

for all we know to the contrary, he may be seeing him off at Southampton to-day.'

Jack shook his head. Something within him told him that the sergeant's reading of the riddle was not a correct one. There was more behind his friend's disappearance than that.

'What time do you expect the men from town?'

'At any minute, sir,' said the sergeant. 'They should have been out here by this time.'

'Then I think I will wait for them,' said Jack, 'and accompany them in their search. Mr. Ormby is an old friend, and I am naturally very anxious on his account.'

'I can quite understand that, sir,' said the sergeant. 'Let's hope we shall find him before very long.'

A few minutes later a cart made its appearance and in it were seated four police-constables. They had brought with them under the seat the gruesome dragging appliances, at which Jack glanced with a shudder. Heaven help his friend if those terrible articles were necessary for discovering him. Leaving one of the men in charge of the station the sergeant mounted to the cart, and the three others returned to their places.

'I thought we would search the meadows

first and the river,' said the sergeant; 'then we might try the millpool, and after that the wood behind. As you know, there's a path across the meadows that makes short cut to Brackford, and as Mr. Ormby is acquainted with it it's very likely they would take it.'

'Drive on, then, and I will follow you,' replied Jack. 'Don't let us lose any time. If, as I fear, there has been foul play the sooner we put the police all over the country on the alert the better.'

The sergeant whipped up the horse, and the cart rattled down the road in the direction of the meadows, which formed a portion of the missing man's property. Every portion of these were diligently searched, but without success. They then turned their attention to the river, a stream which wound its way round the foot of the hill towards a quaint old mill, a mile and a half perhaps from Ormby's house. For the greater part of its run it was scarcely more than two feet deep, but there were a couple of pools where an eight feet rod would barely touch the bottom. Here the drags were brought into play and the result was awaited, by Jack at least, with breathless anxiety. But though they tried backwards and forwards all that was brought to

light was a tin can. From this it was evident that Ormby had neither thrown himself, nor had he been thrown, in there. The same result was achieved at the next hole. Afterwards they proceeded to the mill to which I have already referred. The pool itself was of considerable depth, and at the moment of their arrival was flowing under the building at a prodigious rate. Assisted by the miller and his man they dragged and redragged until they were tired. The result, however, was the same as before. No trace of a body was to be discovered. Leaving the mill they continued their search down stream for another couple of miles, and then turned to the small wood on the other side. The path to Brackford led through this, and had the stranger meant any harm to his companion, here was the spot for him to carry out his intentions. But though they searched it from one end to the other, and peered into every hole and clump of bracken, their trouble was not rewarded. A disused chalk-pit on the further side was next visited, but they found nothing there. They made inquiries at the little village half a mile further on, but every person they questioned declared that neither he, nor she, had seen anything of Mr. Ormby.

'I think, sir, you will find that it will turn out as I have said,' said the sergeant, mopping his dripping brow. 'I don't know where else we can search in the neighbourhood.'

'Nor I,' Jack remarked dolefully.

Then when the sergeant had promised to communicate with him should they make any discovery, he turned his horse homewards, a totally different individual from the happy-go-lucky fellow who had treated the children in Mrs. Gabbage's shop two days before.

'Poor little Dot,' he said as he rode along, 'this will prove a terrible blow to her. I wonder how I shall be able to break the news.'

By the time he reached the Croft he had made up his mind as to his course of action, and with a heavy heart he rode up the drive and gave up his horse in the stable-yard. Entering the house by the back way, he proceeded straight to the drawing-room where he found his sister. She was sitting there making a pretence of sewing, but it was little work that she accomplished. There was an anxious, harried expression upon her face that told its own tale. Her brother fancied that she had been crying, but he did not say anything to her upon the subject. On seeing him she rose from her seat.

'What is the matter?' she asked. 'Why does he not come?'

'I'll try to tell you if you'll sit down,' Jack began in a faltering voice, 'but you must promise me to be calm, Dot.'

The girl gave a little start.

'Then there *is* something wrong,' she gasped. 'You have bad news for me. Tell me, Jack, for pity's sake.'

'It is bad news,' her brother replied, 'but we mustn't give up hope yet. The fact of the matter is Jim has disappeared.'

Then he told his story, softening it as well as he knew how, but it was impossible to do so very much. The result was that the poor girl was crushed as beneath an avalanche. She buried her face in the cushion of the sofa, and refused to be comforted.

'I thought we were going to be so happy,' she wailed, 'and now he is taken from me almost before we knew that we loved each other. It is too cruel!'

Jack did his best to soothe her, telling her that she must not look on the black side; that even now it was still possible her lover might be alive.

'No, no!' she answered through her tears; 'if he were alive he would have come yester-

day or have sent word to me. No, I feel certain that he is dead.'

Thinking that it might do her good, Jack left her to have her cry out. When he returned in an hour's time she was calmer, though, as may be imagined, very cast down.

When they had discussed the case for some considerable time they arrived at the decision that the only point in favour of the sergeant's theory was the fact that up to that time the body of Ormby had not been found. On the other hand, any moment might bring it to light. Until that happened they could only possess their souls in patience.

As Jack sat down to his solitary dinner that night—for his sister had gone to her room and did not come down—he found it difficult to believe that the man who sat at his board only two nights before had vanished so completely. It was almost impossible to realise that in all human probability they would never speak to him again.

'A sad business,' he said to himself for about the thousandth time. 'I would have given anything to have saved poor little Dot from this misery.'

After dinner he informed his sister that he intended driving into the town to make further

inquiries, and to discover whether the police had received information of any sort.

'You are very good to me, Jack,' she said. 'I don't think I shall ever be happy again. I know now that I loved him always, and when I think how I played with his affections, I feel as though I could kill myself for having done so.'

'Hush, hush! You must not talk like that. Jim, poor old fellow, would be the last to wish it.'

When the dogcart was at the door Jack set off on his drive to the town. As he went he thought of the new arrivals at the Castle. He had been too unhappy and too busy all day to bestow a thought upon them. Now he found himself recalling that beautiful face he had seen for the first time at the railway station. What an amount of trouble had come upon him since he had described her to his sister, and had spoken to her about calling upon them. He had lost his best friend, and his sister's heart was broken.

On reaching the police-station he left the cart, and entered to make inquiries. The officer on duty informed him that so far they had made no discovery. The body of the missing man had not been found, nor had they received any information to prove that he was still alive.

'We have made inquiries at the railway station,' said the official, 'but the people there are all unanimous in declaring that they saw nothing of Mr. Ormby on the night in question or on the morning following. Scotland Yard is now taking the affair up, and inquiries are being made at all the principal seaports. Unfortunately, however, the very meagre description the groom is able to give us of the man who stopped the dogcart, and who went away with Mr. Ormby, prevents us doing what we might otherwise have done had we more information to act upon. You do not know, I suppose, how much money he had on him when he left you?'

'Yes, I can set you right there,' said Jack, 'not more than a few shillings at any rate. I know this because after dinner we had an amicable dispute over a horse he had lately purchased. "Bet you all the money I have in my pocket I am right," he said, producing about half-a-dozen coins at the same time, most of which were coppers.'

'He may have had more money about him; but, if he had not, that is another argument against the theory that he went away by train,' said the inspector.

'I don't know why, but I feel convinced

that he did not,' Jack replied. 'Unless he went suddenly mad I can't for the life of me see why he should have done so. He had the best of all reasons for calling upon me on the following morning, and I am positive that no business, save one of life and death, would have prevented him from coming. Somehow I am convinced that he has been murdered, and I think you will find eventually that I am right.'

'I hope not, sir,' the police officer replied, after which Jack bade him good-evening and left the office.

It was with a sorrowful heart that he drove home. His dismal anticipations had been fulfilled, and he had no good news to give to his sister. She, poor child, had fallen asleep, so he did not wake her, but proceeded to his study, where he threw himself in an easy-chair. He smoked one cigar after another as he endeavoured to solve the mystery. But though he filled the room with smoke, so that he had to throw open the French windows which led on to the verandah, he was no nearer unravelling it than he had been before. He was lying in the most comfortable chair in the room, a deep wicker one. His head was thrown back upon a cushion, and his eyes

were fixed upon the ceiling. Suddenly it seemed to him that he heard a peculiar noise, that was not very much unlike the sound made when a card is flicked across a room. He sat up and looked about him, but he could see no sign of anything such as I have described. Ascribing the noise to his imagination, he lay back again in his chair and once more contemplated the ceiling. It was not until he rose to retire to bed that he became aware of something white lying upon the carpet near the window. Crossing the room he picked it up, to discover that it was a letter addressed to himself in a quite unknown and uneducated handwriting.

'What can it mean?' he asked himself as he broke open the envelope. 'And who on earth threw it in here? That must have been the sound I heard.' Withdrawing the contents he read as follows:

'If you wants to know where your friend is you'd better ax at the Mitcham Shipping Office. If you don't know why he run away I ain't a-goin' to tell yer. That's enough for the present.—Yours, A WELL-WISHER.'

For a moment Trowbridge stood with the

paper in his hand, not knowing how to act. Then he turned it over and over, examining it in every way. Was it genuine or was it a hoax? What was more—who was the author, and how was he connected with the missing man? Whoever he might be, he must be a daring sort of individual to present the letter at such an hour, and to throw it into the room as he had done.

During the next half-hour Jack perused it again and again, though at the end of that time he could not, for the life of him, see how he was to act. Of course, if inquiries at the Mitcham Shipping Office meant his learning something regarding his missing friend, it was his duty to make them. On the other hand, was this an attempt to lure him out of the district in order that the real culprit might have a chance of escape?'

Next morning he showed the letter to his sister, who, without hesitation, declared it to be a trick.

'I don't believe that Jim would act like that,' she said, her eyes filling with indignant tears. 'I will never allow that he would be so base as to tell me that he loved me and then run away from England a few hours later. You, who have known him so long,

should surely not do him the dishonour of believing what this letter insinuates.'

'Nevertheless it behoves us,' said Jack, 'not to neglect a single chance of discovering him. I shall take this letter to the police at Great Brackford after breakfast and hear what they think of it; and then, if they are disposed to place any credence in it at all, I shall set off for Liverpool and make my own inquiries. For my own part, like you, I do not attach much importance to it, but the extraordinary fashion in which the letter was delivered must lead one to suppose that the author was in earnest. If I go up to Liverpool to-day, I shall be back to-morrow.'

According to the arrangement he had made, after breakfast Jim drove into Brackford and showed the letter to the police. They examined it critically, and were all unanimously of the opinion that it was of no value whatsoever.

'It is either the work of a madman,' said the inspector, 'or a very cruel hoax. You will find, if you go to Liverpool, as you say you are going to do, that they know nothing of Mr. Ormby at the office in question.'

'In any case I am going to run up,' said Jim. 'I should not be doing my duty if I did not.'

From the police-office he drove on to the station. He had taken care to bring a small Gladstone with him containing what he would require during the short time he would be away. He had not any too much time to spare, for he had barely written a note to his sister, explaining what he was about to do, and handed it to his groom, ere the train entered the station. As it commenced to leave the platform he became aware of a tall handsome man, irreproachably dressed, who, as the carriages passed, closely scanned each compartment.

To Jack's amazement the individual in question was none other than his tenant at the castle, Monsieur d'Alvaro!

CHAPTER IV

It was late in the afternoon when Trowbridge reached Liverpool. He knew that all the shipping offices would be closed; for that reason, therefore, he made his way to his hotel and postponed his inquiries until the morning. Then, as soon as his conscience would allow him to do so, he proceeded in the direction of the street in which he had been informed the offices of the Mitcham Line of Steamers were to be found. He had already discovered that the line traded exclusively with South America, and that their service was fortnightly. His mind was made a little uneasy by the fact that their last steamer outward-bound had sailed from Liverpool on the day following Ormby's disappearance. As he told himself, this fact might be only a coincidence; nevertheless, he felt that it was worth noting.

The office in question proved to be a handsome building, boasting on either side of the door large plate-glass windows, in one of which

was a model of a ship, and in the other an advertisement setting forth the advantages of travelling by the Mitcham Line.

When an official came forward to inquire his business he asked if it would be possible for him to see the manager.

'He's engaged at present,' the man replied. 'But if you will take a seat in the waiting-room I will give him your name.'

Jack followed his conductor along the passage to a small room on the right, and then gave him his card. For upwards of a quarter of an hour he was at liberty to study the pictures on the walls, and the pamphlets and shipping papers upon the table. Then the clerk returned and requested Jack to follow him. Opening a door on the left at the further end of the passage, the clerk requested him to enter. He did so, to be received by a short, middle-aged gentleman with iron-grey whiskers and moustache.

'Good-morning, Mr. Trowbridge,' said that little man, wheeling a chair forward as he spoke. 'Won't you sit down and tell me what I can do for you?'

'I have come to see you,' said Jack, 'on rather extraordinary business. As you may observe from the address on my card, I hail from Great Brackford.'

The manager laid himself back in his chair, and clasped his hands as if he were about to begin his devotions.

'Yes, I noticed that,' he replied. 'May I ask if you have been long in Liverpool?'

'I arrived last night and want, if possible, to get back to-night. Hence the reason for my early call.'

'Pray don't apologise. Now tell me what it is that has brought you to me.'

'In our neighbourhood we are in great trouble about a gentleman who has disappeared. He is a particular friend of mine and has just become engaged to my sister.'

The manager nodded his head and commenced polishing a pair of gold-rimmed eye-glasses with a silk handkerchief he took from his pocket.

'You refer to the Honourable James Ormby, I presume?' he said.

Jack stared at him in complete surprise. 'What do you know of that gentleman?' he inquired.

'Strange to say I was discussing the case of his mysterious disappearance only a few minutes before you came in with my last visitor,' said the manager. 'Perhaps you have not seen the account of it in this morning's paper?'

'No, I certainly have not,' said Jack. 'What's more, I'm extremely sorry to hear that the Press have got hold of it. However, I suppose it was inevitable.'

'Quite, I fear. Now, pray tell me in what way I can help you.'

In reply Jack gave him a rough outline of the case, and described the anonymous letter he had received. At the same time he produced the letter in question and handed it across the table to the other.

'Yes, it certainly says the Mitcham Shipping Office,' was his comment when he had read it. 'Well, we have only had one boat sailing lately, and if Mr. Ormby sailed in her it should not be difficult to trace him. If you can give me a description of him I will institute inquiries at once.'

'I can do more than that,' said Jack. 'I can show you his photograph. I took the precaution of bringing one with me.'

So saying, he produced from his pocket a cabinet portrait of the missing man. It had been taken some three or four months prior to his disappearance and was an excellent likeness. The manager examined it carefully through his glasses and then touched the gong upon his table.

'Send Mr. Simpson to me,' he said to the clerk who answered it. Then he added to Jack: 'Mr. Simpson is our passenger-clerk, and if your friend engaged a passage in our boat he is almost sure to remember him.'

A few seconds later the clerk in question made his appearance.

'Mr. Simpson,' said the manager, 'this gentleman is anxious to discover whether a friend of his sailed in the *Marwhal.* His name is Ormby. This is a likeness of him.'

Simpson closely examined the photograph and then placed it upon the table.

'If you will allow me, sir, I will get my ledger. I shall then be able to speak more definitely.'

He left the room to return with a large volume, which he placed upon a side-table. Having discovered the page he wanted he ran his finger down it in search of the name the manager had given him.

'No, sir,' he said, looking up from the book, 'there is no such name here. There were eighteen passengers in the first-class and forty-two in the steerage. But the name of Ormby is not among them.'

'I think it more than probable that he would have travelled under an assumed name,' said

Jack; 'that is to say if he left England at all.'

'In that case,' said the manager, 'the only thing to be done is to rely upon this photograph. Did you book all the passengers personally, Simpson?'

'With the exception of about half a dozen,' answered the clerk; 'that is to say, barring the passages that were taken in London.'

'How many booked there?'

'Only seven—one first-class, and six steerage.'

'Do you know anything regarding the first-class passenger who booked in London?'

'He is a clergyman, an elderly gentleman, going to Rio.'

'Well, then, as you booked most of the rest, can you remember any one resembling this gentleman's friend?'

'Tall, wearing an eyeglass, and having a white scar an inch or so above his left eyebrow,' said Jack.

'I see from the paper that when he was last seen he was wearing a light overcoat and a grey tweed cap,' said the clerk. 'May I ask if that is so?'

'It is,' Jack replied. 'What was more, when he went away with the stranger he was wearing dress clothes.'

The clerk considered for a few moments before he gave his decision.

'No, sir,' he said at last, 'I can't say that I remember your friend. The only young man who booked a first-class passage was a youth of about two-and-twenty, clean shaven, and from his accent I should say of Scotch birth. As I said just now, there were six others whom I did not book. They were booked by Elliott. Possibly he may remember Mr. Ormby.'

'Pray go and ask him, then, and let me know the result.'

The clerk once more left the room and was absent for upwards of ten minutes. During that time the manager and Trowbridge discussed the case. When Simpson returned he brought with him a youth of some twenty years of age.

'Elliott informs me,' he said, 'that on the day in question a gentleman whose description seems to tally in some respects to that of Mr. Ormby, came to the office while I was at lunch, and booked a passage to Monte Video.'

'Describe him, Elliott, as well as you can,' said the manager. 'We shall then be able to judge for ourselves.'

The young man moved uneasily on his feet,

and, having a modest estimation of his own powers, he blushed painfully.

'He was tall, sir, and had a very bad cold.'

'We must have a better description of him than that,' said the manager. 'I am afraid we shan't be able to trace him far by a cold in the head. How was he dressed?'

'He wore a cap and a light overcoat. I couldn't see the colour of his trousers because of the counter. The lower part of his face was hidden by his coat collar. He had no eyeglass so far as I could see.'

'Do you remember if he had a scar upon his forehead?'

'I am not quite certain, sir,' said the youth. 'I shouldn't like to be too sure, but I think he had. He asked me how long it would take the vessel to get to Monte Video, and said that he wanted, if possible, to have a cabin to himself.'

'Did he pay you by cheque or in notes?'

'In notes and gold, sir.'

'Is it your opinion, then, that this photograph is a picture of the passenger you booked?'

'I feel almost certain it is,' the clerk returned.

'What name did he give?'

'Stoneham, sir. James Stoneham.'

The manager looked at Trowbridge.

'Your friend's Christian name was James, was it not?' he inquired.

'Yes,' Jack answered. 'But that may, of course, be a mere coincidence.'

'Of course, of course,' answered the other. 'But coincidences are sometimes strange things. Have you any more questions you would like to put to the clerks?'

'No, thank you,' said Jack. 'I am very much obliged to them for the trouble they have taken.'

The two men accordingly left the room, and Jack and the manager were once more alone.

'The matter grows more and more perplexing every minute,' said the former. 'Of course, this Mr. Stoneham may be my friend, and in that case he is alive. If it is not he, I, for one, can only believe him to be dead. How on earth can I satisfy myself as to his identity?'

'Let me think,' said the manager, once more placing his hands in the position I have already indicated. 'The vessel does not call anywhere until she reaches St. Vincent. If I may make a suggestion this is what I should advise you to do. I should send a telegram to the captain asking him to cause a notice to be posted

in the first-class saloon and in the steerage, imploring James Ormby, if he is on board the ship, to communicate with you by cable before the ship leaves the port. If he is on board it cannot fail to catch his eye. At the same time, if you like, I will send a telegram to the captain instructing him to reply by wire as to whether this Mr. Stoneham is marked upon the forehead as you describe. That, taken into conjunction with your telegram, should surely set matters at rest so far as the *Marwhal* is concerned.'

Jack saw the wisdom contained in this suggestion and gladly fell in with it.

'I cannot express my gratitude to you,' he said. 'As you say, this course should go a long way towards settling matters. With your permission I will write the telegram and send it to you together with a cheque which I should be obliged if you would fill in for the cost, whatever it may be. As you may suppose, this has been a terrible shock to my sister. It will be a long time before she will get over it.'

'We must hope for the best,' the manager replied. 'It may not be as serious as you suppose.'

Jack, however, only shook his head.

After he had thanked the manager for his trouble, he shook hands and departed. As he passed through the outer office he paused to ask Simpson if his colleague were aware what amount of luggage the mysterious Mr. Stoneham took on board with him. This, unfortunately, proved to be a question Elliott could not offer any satisfactory reply to.

After once more thanking the men for the trouble they had taken, Trowbridge left the office. For a moment he paused on the pavement as if he were not quite certain in what direction he should proceed in order to reach his hotel. Then, having made up his mind, he turned to his right and set off along the crowded pavement. During that momentary pause, however, he had noticed, standing on the other side of the street, a short and somewhat foreign-looking individual, wearing a frock-coat and silk hat. Never having seen the man before Trowbridge paid but little attention to him, but when he reached the next cross-street and became aware that the stranger was walking level with him the matter struck him as being somewhat out of the common. To reach the thoroughfare in which his hotel was situated it was necessary for him to cross the road and turn to the left.

'If I see anything of the man when I am round the corner I shall feel sure that he is following me,' he said to himself.

To make sure of this he stopped at a print-shop window and stood for some moments intently regarding the contents. The opposite side of the street was reflected in the glass as clearly as a mirror.

'Egad! he *is* following me,' he muttered. 'Now, what on earth can be his reason for so doing? I'll swear I've never seen the fellow before.'

The stranger had walked on a few yards and was now, in his turn also, gazing into a shop window.

'I'll just try him once more to make sure,' said Jack, 'and then I've a good mind to ask him point blank what he means. I object to having my footsteps dogged.'

Leaving the window of the print-shop, he walked on faster than before, and then turned sharp round into a narrow street. This he found brought him into a small square, surrounded by dingy offices on every side. There happened to be a small stationer's shop at the further end, and towards this he made his way. Entering, he asked the shopman to show him some drawing-paper, and while the latter was

producing his ware looked out into the square. He was not disappointed in what he expected to see there, for the man who had been following him was now pacing up and down on the opposite side. Having purchased some paper and paid for it, Trowbridge left the shop determined to have a discussion with his shadower. To his surprise, however, the fellow had disappeared and was not to be seen anywhere.

'This is getting more inexplicable every minute,' muttered Trowbridge to himself. 'I should like to know what game the fellow is playing. Surely he can't be in league with the man who sent me that anonymous message? By Jove! he might be. And, if so, what ought I to do?'

It did not take him long to make up his mind, and, having made sure that the stranger was not following him, he hailed a hansom and bade the driver take him to the police-station. In less than a quarter of an hour he was closeted with a prominent member of the detective force, had explained to him the interest he took in what was now called 'The Famous Ormby Case,' of the letter he had received, and of the way his movements had been shadowed that morning.

'It's a strange business altogether,' said the

officer. 'You say that the anonymous letter was thrown into your study late at night?'

'Yes. After my household had retired to rest,' answered Jack.

'That would seem to suggest that the writer either lived in the neighbourhood or had friends who did. What seems to me so strange is the fact that they should have sent you a message at all. If your friend has *really* left for South America, what possible interest could they have in letting you into his secret, especially if it is through their agency that he was driven away? Then, again, supposing that this man who has been following you is in the secret, how can your movements affect him? The only solution I can offer is that they wanted to get you away for a time. How does that strike you?'

'There may be something in it,' Jack replied. 'I do not pretend, however, to be able to read the riddle. The whole matter is beyond me. I can make neither head nor tail of it.'

'The folk in town do not seem to be able to make head nor tail of it either,' said the officer. 'One thing, however, so far as we are concerned, is quite plain. That is, we must find out who the man is who is shadowing you, and, if possible, his reasons for so doing. That

accomplished, we may be able to grope our way a little further in the darkness that surrounds the case. If you will return to your hotel, I will put a man on to watch this gentleman, for in all probability he will be on the lookout for you there. You are quite sure, I suppose, that he does not know you have come here?'

'I feel certain that he does not,' Jack answered. 'I was going to tackle him myself, but he mysteriously disappeared. Then I came on here as quickly as I could.'

'It would be just as well to be certain on that point,' said the other. 'If you will accompany me I will take you to a window where you can see the length of the street without being seen by any one outside.'

Jack followed him to another room where there was a small window. He searched the street up and down, but without discovering any sign of the man in question.

'No, he is not there,' he said. 'He has evidently missed me for the time being.'

'Pardon me for a moment,' said the detective, 'and I will show you the man who will keep watch outside your hotel.'

He left the room, and when he returned was accompanied by a quiet, solemn-looking per-

sonage, who resembled a Methodist preacher more than a detective.

His superior briefly furnished him with the facts of the case, after which Jack gave him as good a description of the man he was to watch as he could well remember.

'You must keep your eye on him until you find out who he is and where he hails from, and then report to me. You say you are returning to town, Mr. Trowbridge, by the afternoon train?'

'That is my intention, unless it is necessary for me to stay in Liverpool. In that case I will willingly do so.'

'I don't think there is any need for you to postpone your journey,' said the officer. 'We cannot take any action against this man even if we do find out who he is. We can keep him under our eye, however, and by finding out who he is, endeavour to throw some light upon the whole affair. If my surmises are correct, he will watch you until you leave, and then communicate the fact of your return to the south to those who are employing him.'

After thanking the detective for his courtesy, Jack returned to his hotel. As he made his way down the street he looked about him for the man he expected to find there, but without

discovering him. This caused him to wonder whether or not he had not been mistaken in supposing that the other had been shadowing him. When in the middle of his luncheon, however, he chanced to look out and see that individual standing on the other side of the way, he felt sure that his original supposition was correct. The house immediately behind his follower was a restaurant, and, seated at a table at the window, Jack observed the grave countenance of the detective whose services had been placed at his disposal.

After he had finished his meal he made his way to the writing-room, where he composed the telegram suggested by the manager of the Mitcham Steamship Company. In it he asked the captain to post a notice requesting James Ormby, if he were on board the *Marwhal*, to cable to his friend, John Trowbridge, to whom his absence was causing the keenest grief. Then, having signed a cheque drawn in favour of the Mitcham Steamship Company, he sealed the letter and despatched it to their offices by one of the hotel servants. Then he was at liberty to disport himself as he pleased until the hour should arrive for him to make his way to the railway station. How to amuse himself he did not know, but eventually he left the

hotel, engaged a cab, and informed the driver that he could show him such beauties of the city as could be crammed into the space of an hour and a half. While he was giving his directions he glanced casually across the street and noticed that his shadower had become aware of his exit.

Then he entered the cab and drove off, and in an aimless fashion explored street after street, made the acquaintance of a variety of shipping, a large number of unsavoury back streets, and at last found himself back at the hotel once more.

'If you like to wait for ten minutes you can drive me to the railway station,' said Jack to his cabman. 'I shan't be longer than that.'

'All right sir,' said the man, touching his hat, 'I'll wait.'

As Jack observed, there was some one else waiting too. The little man in the frock-coat had made his appearance on the opposite side while he was speaking, and was now staring into a shop window, as if preparatory to buying all it contained. Some thirty or forty yards down the pavement, and on the same side as the hotel, talking to the policeman on the beat, was the detective from the police-station,

who from time to time glanced across at the man he was so carefully keeping in view.

Jack made his way into the hotel, called for and settled his bill, tipped the waiter and hall-porter, and, when his bag had been brought from his bedroom, made his way into the street. His spy was in the act of engaging a hansom as he took his seat.

When he reached the station he made inquiries as to the platform from which his train would leave, and made his way thence. He had not been there many minutes before the man he was expecting put in an appearance, followed by the detective. The former, after having satisfied himself that he had not made a mistake, seated himself by the bookstall, turning his head now and again in the direction of the train which was already drawn up beside the platform. The detective, on the other hand, paced up and down as if he were awaiting the arrival of some friend.

Having procured all the literature he would require for the journey Trowbridge seated himself in a first-class carriage, and lit a cigar. From his seat he was able to see both men.

Five minutes later the porters were calling upon passengers to take their seats, and Jack

had the pleasure of seeing the spy make his way towards the telegraph office.

'He's wiring his friends that I have left Liverpool,' he said to himself. 'I wonder if the police will be able to find out who those friends are?'

Then the train moved slowly out of the station, and for the time being, at least, Liverpool was a place of the past.

What with one change and another it was nearly midnight by the time he reached Great Brackford. As may be supposed, he was thoroughly tired out, but, weary though he was, glad enough to sit up and tell his sister all that had befallen him during his absence from her. She, poor girl, had passed a miserable time. Unfortunately, the news he had been able to bring back with him was not of a character calculated to afford her much relief.

Next morning he was smoking a pipe in his study, when his butler entered with a card upon a salver. He glanced at it to find to his astonishment that it bore the name of 'Gonsalvez Ferdinand d'Alvaro.'

CHAPTER V

Jack Trowbridge would be a hypocrite indeed if he were to pretend that he received the announcement of Monsieur d'Alvaro's name without a vast amount of astonishment. At that moment he was the last person he expected to see, and, to confess the truth, he was somewhat at a loss to understand to what he might attribute his call. He rose immediately, however, to meet his tenant. As usual D'Alvaro was irreproachably dressed, and presented a handsome appearance as he entered the room. His dark hair and beard, and his cold, black eyes, were in admirable contrast with his sallow complexion. Taken altogether his was a personality that would be likely to command attention wherever he might go. As Trowbridge looked at him the conviction was forced upon him that this was not at all the sort of man he would care to quarrel with.

'Good-morning, Mr. Trowbridge,' D'Alvaro commenced, speaking in English, with scarcely a trace of foreign accent. 'As I happened

to be passing in this direction I took the liberty of dropping in upon you in order to discuss a small matter with you.'

'I am very glad to see you,' Jack replied, motioning him to a chair. 'I hope, however, it is not due to the fact that there is anything wrong at the Castle that you have called to see me?'

'Oh dear, no,' the other answered, with a smile. 'To be candid with you, I have come to beg a favour of you. At the end of what is called Long Walk, you may remember, there exists a wooden gate, which, so the keepers tell me, has been nailed up for many years. It opens, I understand, on a side-road, and what I want is your permission to restore it to its former use. Of course at the expiration of my tenancy it might be made secure again, should you desire it.'

'You are quite welcome to do as you please with it,' said Jack, not, however, without some wonderment that his tenant should have come to see him on such a trivial matter. 'I fancy my father had it nailed up on account of the gipsies who more than once forced the lock, and entered the preserves from that side. I trust that you have found everything to your satisfaction at the Castle?'

'Most satisfactory,' said the other. 'Indeed, it could not be more so. We have settled comfortably, and I am exceedingly obliged to you for all the trouble you have taken.'

'I was only too glad to find a good tenant,' was Jack's rejoinder. 'I have been trying to let the place for some time, but until you approached me, through your agent, I had not had an offer that was worth accepting. I hope Madame d'Alvaro will enjoy her stay in the neighbourhood.'

'Pardon me, but there is no Madame d'Alvaro,' the other replied, with a smile. 'I am a bachelor, and I fear am likely to remain one.'

'I must beg your pardon,' said Jack; 'but I was at the railway station when you arrived, and seeing a lady with you I naturally concluded that she was your wife.'

'No,' he answered, with a slight contraction of his brows; 'the lady you saw with me is my ward.'

It was evident from his abrupt manner of speaking that the subject was not altogether convenient to him, for he immediately changed it by inquiring after the sporting capabilities of the neighbourhood. He mentioned that he was extremely fond of shooting and also that

he intended to hunt when the season came round.

'I have never tried your English fox-hunting,' he remarked; 'but I have hunted almost everything else, my fellow-man included, since I was a boy. I hope to have the pleasure of meeting the Master of the Hounds at an early date, and I trust he will permit me to do whatever I can in the furthering of such a noble sport.'

'I am quite sure he will,' said Jack, with a hearty laugh. 'Where his beloved hounds are concerned, Beverill has no conscience. I believe he is the most arrant money-grubber in that respect that ever sat in a saddle. He will certainly allow you to help him.'

'I shall be only too pleased,' returned D'Alvaro. 'By the way, I am extremely sorry to hear this bad news about Mr. Hornby. I understand that he is a friend of yours?'

'Mr. Ormby,' corrected Jack. 'Yes, it is a very bad business. I would give a great deal to know what it all means. He is my oldest friend, and I am naturally very much grieved.'

'Have the police no clue? Did he leave no trace at all behind him?'

'None whatever,' Jack replied. 'The last person to see him was his groom, who watched him walk away with a tall stranger. Since then nothing has been heard of him.'

'But did not the groom recognise the stranger? I should have thought that that would lead to something.'

'No. The man says that he would not know him again if he were to see him.'

Then, with a confidence in other people that is one of his most charming characteristics, Jack went on to describe to his tenant the anonymous letter he had received, and the journey to Liverpool to which it had given rise. He told him of the manner in which he had been followed while in the city, and of the telegram he had sent to meet the *Marwhal* at St. Vincent.

'From what you have told me,' said D'Alvaro, 'I am inclined to believe that you will receive a message from that port saying that your friend is on board and that he will write from Monte Video to explain matters to you.'

'I sincerely trust that that may be so,' Jack continued. 'Nevertheless, I am not at all easy in my mind. However, I have no right to bore you with my troubles, just when you

are new to the neighbourhood. Doubtless you have grown weary of the subject already.'

'That would be impossible,' returned the other politely. 'I am, of course, anxious to express to you my sympathy in your trouble. Now I must wish you good-morning, and thank you again for the permission you have given me to make use of that gate.'

Jack begged him not to mention it, and then escorted him to the front door, where a neat mail phaeton was drawn up.

'Whatever else he may lack,' said Jack, 'he possesses excellent taste in horseflesh. That off-side animal is about as near perfection as it is possible for him to be.'

When the other had disappeared down the drive he returned to his study, to find his sister there awaiting his coming.

'Who was that with you?' she asked eagerly, as if she hoped it might be a messenger with good tidings.

'Our tenant at the Castle, Monsieur d'Alvaro,' Jack replied. 'He came to ask permission to open that old gate at the end of the Long Walk, a somewhat needless request, so it seems to me. The place is his property for the time being, and he has a perfect right to open the gate, should he

desire to do so, without consulting me. However, I suppose he wanted to be polite, so I should not grumble.'

'I don't like his face, Jack,' said Dot. 'It made me shudder when I saw it.'

'Good gracious! And why?'

'I cannot tell you, except that it seemed to me to be cruel.'

'On the other hand, it struck me as being exceedingly prepossessing. He is not half so foreign as I expected he would be. His English is exceptionally good, and he does not gesticulate as do so many foreigners. By the way, the lady about whom I spoke to you turns out to be his ward and not his wife or his daughter. You will have to call upon her.'

Dot uttered a little cry.

'Oh, Jack, not now,' she said. 'I could not go out anywhere now. You must not ask me.'

In a moment Jack was repentant.

'Forgive me, Dot,' he said. 'For the minute I had forgotten poor Jim. It has been the first time he has been out of my thoughts since we heard the news.'

Dot threw her arms round his neck and cried softly on his shoulder.

'Unless we can find him I shall never be

happy again,' she said. 'Is there nothing we can do for him?'

'We can only wait and hope,' answered Jack. 'We know that the police are doing all in their power to discover his whereabouts, and we could not leave the case in better hands.'

'But it is the waiting, the terrible anxiety that kills,' she went on. 'Day and night I am thinking of him and picturing all sorts of horrors that may have happened to him, until hope seems dead. If it lasts much longer I believe I shall go mad. And to think that only such a short time ago I was so happy!'

'And let's hope you will be so again,' returned her brother. 'If Jim is on the *Marwhal* on the way to South America, he is almost certain to telegraph to us from St. Vincent, and then your fears will be set at rest.'

'He is not on board the ship,' returned his sister, in the tone of one who speaks with conviction. 'I am sure of that as I am of anything. Do you think he would have gone to Liverpool and have sailed from England without sending me a line to say why or where he was going? No, Jack, you do not believe that any more than I do.'

'It certainly seems very improbable,' replied

her brother, 'but we do not know under what circumstances he went away. From what I gathered the ship sailed immediately he arrived on board, and as the train by which he travelled—that is to say if he left London by the early morning train—did not arrive at Liverpool more than an hour before she left, he would certainly not have had time to write you a letter.'

'But he would have sent me a telegram. It is very good of you to try to comfort me, Jack, but at present I fear it is impossible.'

'Try to bear up as well as you can,' said Jack. 'I know how terrible the blow has been to you, and I would have given anything to have been able to spare you. We may hear something from the police to-day.'

But though they waited anxiously, no news reached them. In the afternoon Jack ordered his dogcart and drove into the town to make inquiries for himself. He was, however, in no way successful. Further search had been made by the local police about the neighbourhood, but up to that time they had discovered nothing that would tend to throw a light upon the mystery. They had heard nothing from Liverpool regarding the man who had followed Jack about that city.

'They are just as puzzled at headquarters as we are,' said the officer in charge. 'They've got two of their best men on the job, and up to the present it's fairly beaten them. The papers are making a great fuss about it, sir.'

He said this with an air of pride, feeling, doubtless, that he was in a great measure a participator in the honour that Great Brackford was deriving from this mysterious case.

'They're making a great deal too much fuss about it,' said Jack angrily.

'We had the Earl of Castle Fergo here this morning, sir,' continued the other. 'He came down here by train to make inquiries himself. Perhaps you know his lordship?'

'I have met him,' Jack replied; but did not add that he thoroughly detested the old peer. 'Did he seem to be much distressed?'

'Well, sir, between ourselves, I can't say that he did. He asked a lot of questions, and told us to be sure to let him know at once if there were any news. He said that he was on the eve of leaving for America, "and that all this confounded mystery would detain him in England." Those were his words, sir, just as he spoke them. He said that his sons had always been a trouble to him in their lives,

and now he supposed that this one was going to be by his death.'

'I am almost inclined to agree with him,' Jack remarked.

Having no desire to discuss the matter with the officer he bade him good-night and proceeded into the street once more. It was a lovely evening, and the little town appeared drowsy after the noonday heat. The High Street was well-nigh deserted, and a vagrant cur was stretched out asleep on the steps of the Town Hall. Bidding his groom follow him with the trap, Jack sauntered along the pavement until he came to a fishing-tackle shop. This he entered. As he was about to leave it again, he encountered at the door a stout, burly personage, who was none other than the principal doctor of the town.

'Good afternoon, squire,' said the man of medicine. 'You are the very man of all others I want to see. If I hadn't met you I should have written you to-night.'

'In that case I have saved you the trouble,' said Jack. 'What is it you want to ask me? If you are going to request the favour of my company at another horse fair I'll tell you before you commence that you can spare yourself the trouble, for I'll not go.'

The doctor laughed heartily—an honest laugh that did as much good in a sick-room as any physic he might prescribe.

'You needn't fear on that score,' he said, putting his hand upon the other's shoulder. 'You shall go with me to no more fairs.'

'Then what is it?'

'You remember young Samuel Brett, son of Tom Brett, of Langsdale? The lad who was so badly mauled by poachers a year back?'

'Yes, perfectly,' Jack replied. 'What about him?'

'Well, he's been very ill these two months past. In fact, he's only just out of hospital. They are full at Langsdale, or they would have taken him on again. As it is he can get nothing to do. I want to know if you can find him a billet? It would be a great charity if you would, for I can assure you that the young fellow is is in dire straits. You know enough of him to be sure of his honesty, and I understand that he would make a first-rate under-keeper. What do you think you can do?'

'I'm not certain that I can do anything,' said Jack. 'I will think it over, however. As you are aware, now that I have given up the Castle, I have no need for keepers, otherwise

I would take him on myself—for a time at least.'

'I suppose the new tenant at the Castle is not in want of a man?'

'I'm not sure, but I might try. I have no idea what arrangements he has made.'

'Well, if you can do anything I shall be deeply grateful to you,' said the doctor. 'And so, I am sure, will Brett.'

Jack promised to bear the matter in mind, and then went out to his cart. As he drove slowly down the street he recalled the fact that the last time he had seen the young man in question had been when he had last shot at Langsdale Park, and then poor Jim Ormby had been one of the party. While he was thinking of this the memory of a certain beautiful face rose before his mind's eye.

'By Jove!' he muttered to himself. 'There's my excuse ready made.'

Without more ado he whipped up his horse and left the town at a smart pace. Having crossed the old bridge he turned to the left, and followed the road along until he reached the Castle gates. They were closed, but the old lodge-keeper, who had known him since he was a baby, opened them to him with a smile of welcome upon her wrinkled face.

'Is Mr. d'Alvaro at home, Mrs. Penney?' Jack asked, after he had inquired after her health and that of her husband.

'Yes, sir. I am almost sure he is,' the woman replied. 'Leastways, he hasn't passed through these gates this afternoon.'

'Well, I shall very soon be able to find out,' the young man replied, and continued his way up the drive.

There are few finer residences in this dear old land of ours than Streffon Castle. Indeed, I have heard it compared favourably with several larger and better known places. The Castle itself is more than a mile from the lodge gates, the drive to it for the most part running through plantations where rabbits scurry about on business of so much importance that they have scarcely time to stop and look at you, and gorgeous cock pheasants strut to and fro as if there were no such thing as a shooting season. After the plantations you skirt a miniature lake, where Jack was once well-nigh drowned as a boy, and then after passing under an arch you find yourself in a large courtyard where is the front door. As Jack entered it he found it difficult to realise that he was entering the home of his forefathers in the capacity of a stranger. The

old place was filled with associations for him. He could recall the night, so many years ago, when the snow was on the ground, and the waits had come to sing in the courtyard, he and Dot had been carried, swaddled up, to the window to hear them. He could remember the day of his father's funeral, and the mournful procession which had wound its way down the drive; also the day on which he and his sister had said farewell to the old place, fearing that it would never be possible for them to live there again.

When his groom had ascertained that Mr. d'Alvaro was at home he left the dogcart and entered the house. The portraits of his ancestors looked down on him as if in greeting, as he followed the butler along the hall to the room which had been his father's study in bygone days. Nothing had been changed in it, but it came to Jack as a shock to find a stranger seated in his father's chair, the same in which he had so often curled himself up with a book when he was a boy.

'This is exceedingly kind of you, Mr. Trowbridge,' D'Alvaro began, as he advanced to shake hands. 'I was wondering whether any one would take pity upon my loneliness.'

'I have come to see you,' said Jack, 'on

behalf of some one else. A friend of mine is very much interested in a young man who was underkeeper near here. He has been very ill and has just left the hospital. The place he occupied before his illness has been filled up, and my friend and I am trying to obtain another situation for him. I do not know what arrangements you have made, but I deemed it possible that you might be able to find an opening for him. He's an honest, hard-working fellow, and if you were to take him on I do not think you would regret it. I would do so myself but that I have no work for such a man.'

'I will speak to my head-keeper about it,' said D'Alvaro. 'I am afraid, however, that I shall not be able to oblige you. I fancy he has as many men as he wants. From what he tells me I gather that the neighbourhood is a very quiet one, and that what little poaching there is done is not of a very serious character. At the same time, it is always as well to know of a good man, and, should there be room for him, I should be glad to avail myself of his services.'

For some reason or another Jack felt that his companion was not best pleased to see him. For a man usually so self-possessed he was

nervous and ill at ease. More than once he glanced nervously at the door, as if he were fearing some one might enter. Moreover, his conversation was disjointed and fragmentary, showing plainly that his thoughts were not fixed upon the matter in hand. At last Jack rose to go, not a little chagrined by the fact that the other had not offered to introduce him to his ward. Though D'Alvaro pressed him to remain a little longer, he could see that it was only for politeness' sake, and that his host was in reality extremely anxious to be rid of him.

'If you can find an opening for young Brett,' said Jack, as they passed down the hall, once more, 'I shall probably hear from you?'

'You may count upon hearing from me in any case, and you may be quite sure that I will do the best I can for the man.'

The elderly foreign butler opened the door and D'Alvaro stood upon the steps until Jack had mounted to his seat in the dogcart. Then, with a wave of the hand, they bade each other farewell, and the younger man drove out of the courtyard.

'Look here, Dinton,' said Jack, as they turned the corner by the rose-garden, 'I

think I'll walk home. I haven't had much exercise to-day, and it will do me good.'

'Very good, sir,' said the man, as his master descended.

As Jack was well aware, by taking the first turning to the left and following the path that ran at the foot of the rose-garden, he could reach what was known as the Long Walk, and then go on through the plantation to the gate concerning which Mr. d'Alvaro had called upon him on the previous day. Then he could follow the path across the meadows and so reach the Croft in something under half an hour. It was a charming walk on a summer's evening, but he was by no means in the humour to enjoy it.

Whether it was the fact that his old home was in stranger's hands, or whether it was that he was weighed down by the mystery connected with Jim Ormby, and the sorrow it had brought on Dot, it is impossible to say. He was more miserable, however, than he had been for many a long day. When he reached the end of the terrace he turned and looked back across the stately gardens to the Castle basking in the sunshine. A thin wreath of grey smoke curled up into the still air, while the rooks cawed lazily in the elms behind the house.

With a heavy sigh he resumed his walk, passing from the terrace, by the little wicker gate, into the plantation. On either side of the path rabbits scurried away, the more adventurous sitting up after they had travelled a few yards, as if to discover who this strange intruder might be; a wee grey squirrel watched him thoughtfully from the bough of a beech-tree, and as it did not run to cover, was evidently of the opinion that he was to be trusted after all. When he was about half-way through the plantation he found himself turning, almost by instinct, from the main track to another which led away to the left. It had not been used for many years, and now could scarcely be distinguished from the ground on either side. It led, as he so well knew, to a curious old ruin, all that remained of what had once been a tower, the use of which no one had been able to satisfactorily determine. In bygone days Dot and he had been fond of playing there, and it struck him now that he would like to look at it once more. So thick was the plantation round the tower itself, that the building was almost hidden and could not be observed until one was close upon it. Suddenly he stopped and listened. He was the possessor of a sharp pair of ears and was

not often to be deceived. There it was again! There was not the least doubt about it! It was the sound of a woman crying.

He hastened forward to see if it were in his power to render any assistance. A woman, dressed in black, was seated on a large heap of masonry at the foot of the tower, and sobbing as though her heart would break. On hearing Jack's step she looked up, and then sprang to her feet.

They had met at last! He was face to face with the beautiful girl he had seen at the railway station, and whom D'Alvaro had declared to be his ward.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN Jack Trowbridge realised that he was standing face to face with the beautiful girl he had seen alighting from the train at Great Brackford railway station, he could scarcely conceal his surprise. That she was in dire distress was evident, but what could he do to comfort her? He knew nothing of her save that D'Alvaro had declared her to be his ward. However, as she was aware of his presence, there was nothing for it but for him to speak, even if she were to be offended with him for having trespassed upon her privacy. He accordingly raised his hat, and, advancing, apologised for his intrusion.

'I am afraid I am a double intruder,' he said, 'but I have been calling upon Monsieur d'Alvaro, and walked through the plantation, intending to leave the park by the gate at the end of the Long Walk. This old place used to be a favourite playground of mine in my childhood, and I could not resist the tempta-

tion of seeing it again. I am sorry to observe that you are in trouble. I hope you will not deem me intrusive if I ask whether there is anything I can do to help you?'

The girl looked up at him with startled eyes.

'You should not be here,' she answered in English, which she spoke with a slight foreign accent. 'Pray go at once. If they were to see you it might do you much harm.'

What she meant Jack had not the least idea, but he was conscious of one thing, and that was that he was standing in the presence of the loveliest woman he had ever seen in his life.

'I'm afraid I don't quite understand you,' he said. 'I can assure you, however, I am in no danger.'

'Alas! you do not know,' was the reply, 'and I cannot tell you. But I implore you to go.'

'If you really wish it, I will do so,' he said. 'I cannot leave you, however, until I have satisfied myself as to whether or not it is impossible for me to help you. It is plain to me that you are unhappy, perhaps you need a friend?'

A deep sigh was the only answer, and her eyes were flooded with tears.

'I have no friends,' she said, 'and I am the most miserable girl in the world.'

Jack seated himself on a stone beside her. Her words had touched him more deeply than she supposed.

'Until a few moments ago,' he said, 'we had never spoken to each other. Even now I am ignorant of your name. But, at the risk of being impertinent, may I say that in me you have a friend upon whom you can rely, if only you will do so? My name is Trowbridge, and I am the owner of this place.'

'I thought that was so,' the girl answered. 'You are like some of the pictures that hang in the hall. It is kind of you to offer to help me, but you cannot do so. I thank you sincerely, nevertheless, for your sympathy. Now I pray you to leave me. If you were seen talking to me here it would only add to my troubles and might make Monsieur'—here she paused—'d'Alvaro take a dislike to you.'

A light began to dawn upon Jack, and under its influence his heart seemed to turn to ice. Here was the solution to the riddle, he told himself. This beautiful girl was D'Alvaro's ward, and was soon to become his wife. Since he had found her weeping, and she had admitted that her guardian would be angry if he

discovered them together, it was evident that she did not look forward to the match with pleasure.

'What a fool I must have been not to have thought of that before,' he muttered. 'Now I can understand why D'Alvaro did not introduce her to me. The fellow is evidently coercing her into marrying him, and the poor girl does not see any loophole of escape.'

Once more she turned to him and begged him to leave her.

'Before I do so,' he said, 'will you think me rude if I ask you to tell me your name?'

'It is Inez de Montalva,' she answered. 'My father was a Spaniard, my mother an Englishwoman, and it was from her that I learnt to speak your language. Alas! my poor mother!'

She wrung her hands as she spoke, and once more her eyes filled with tears.

'Inez de Montalva,' said Jack to himself, and he thought that the words sounded like the sweetest music.

'Miss de Montalva,' he said, 'do you believe it is possible for friendship to spring up at a moment's notice?'

'I am afraid I do not understand you,' she said.

'I mean, do you think it possible for two people to meet quite suddenly and by chance, and for one of those persons to leap, as it were, into a friendship that is as strong and honest as if its growth had been the work of years?'

'I have never known such a thing,' she replied, 'but I should not like to say that it could not happen.'

'If you will give me an opportunity, I will prove to you that it can happen,' he answered earnestly, leaning forward to look into her face as he spoke. 'Give me the chance and you will not find another man who will do more than I will to help you. If you like, I will swear it by anything you care to name. My only desire is to prove to you that I am in earnest. I think I can guess your secret.'

She uttered a little cry of horror, and then looked anxiously round her as if she were afraid his words might be overheard.

'No, that is impossible,' she returned, in a voice of alarm. 'You could not guess that. Oh, go, go for pity's sake! If they see you here with me it will harm me more than you can imagine.'

'I would not have that happen for worlds,' Jack replied, 'and yet I cannot leave you in your trouble. Miss de Montalva, though you

have not seen me before to-day, will you look into my face and tell me whether you think I should make you a good friend or not?'

She looked up at him fearlessly.

'Yes,' she answered, 'I think I could trust you. But even that can do no good. I am beyond the reach of help.'

'Never!' Jack replied. 'Surely if you knew assistance was near you, you would avail yourself of it, should occasion arise?'

She shook her head.

'I have already told you,' she said, 'that there can be no help for me—no help at all.'

Jack saw that it was useless discussing the question with her. He therefore rose and prepared to go.

'Good-bye,' he said.

'Good-bye,' she returned.

He bowed to her and then walked away towards the path. Their interview had lasted only a few minutes, but he felt that he had known the girl all his life.

'Come what may,' he muttered, 'that man shall not have her. I see what his game is, and I will fight him upon his own ground. Good heavens! How beautiful she is! And to be forced into a marriage with a man she does not like! It's barbarous!'

Thinking these thoughts, he strolled along through the plantation, sending the rabbits scuttling in all directions. When within a hundred yards or so of the gate he was anxious to reach, he was greeted by a gruff voice.

'Stop!' it said. 'I want a talk mit you.'

Jack turned and found himself confronted with a burly man dressed in corduroys, and carrying a gun upon his arm.

'A keeper—and a foreigner,' said Jack to himself. 'German, if I am any judge of such matters.' Aloud, he added: 'Well, my friend what do you want with me?'

'I want to know what you are doing mit yourself here,' the other answered. 'This is brivate broperty, and you must not walk here.'

'Indeed,' said Jack, running his eyes over the burly man's figure, and making a mental note of its proportions. 'And did your master give orders that the law against trespassers was to be extended to his guests?'

'I know noddings about that,' answered the keeper. 'I only know that tresbassers are not allowed, and I must ask you to go out.'

'That is exactly what I am on my way to do. If you care to, you are at liberty to walk with me as far as the gate, in order to make quite sure that I am off the premises.'

'Dot is just what I will do,' responded the keeper.

Jack thereupon continued his walk until he reached the gate which he had permitted Monsieur d'Alvaro to open. Here he paused and faced his conductor.

'Look here, my friend,' he said. 'In order that there may be no misunderstanding about this business, it would be as well for you to inform your master that the person you accused of trespassing is his landlord, and then we shall not be sailing under false colours. Better still, here is my card. Give it to him.'

He took a card from his pocket and handed it to the other, who glanced at it and then thrust it into the pocket of his coat. Then Jack passed out through the gate, which was closed and securely locked after him.

He had plenty of food for reflection as he walked home that evening. He thought that it was as plain as a pikestaff that D'Alvaro was coercing his ward into marriage, and he had a suspicion that the young lady was being kept a prisoner until the ceremony should have taken place.

'The brute!' he muttered to himself. 'Never mind, from this moment he will have

to fight me also. And I'll give him something to think of, I promise him.'

Filled with these amiable intentions, he reached the Croft. It seemed as if days had elapsed, instead of hours, since he had left it. No further news concerning Ormby had been received in his absence, and Dot looked the picture of despair.

That evening Jack was unusually silent. Easy-going fellow that he was he quite understood that he had reached the crisis of his life. For the first time he was hopelessly, head over heels, in love. That it was not a boyish passion that would wear itself out he was quite certain, and yet how futile it all seemed. Without this girl, who had so suddenly and unexpectedly come into his life, he felt that he could not be happy. And yet what apparently insurmountable difficulties stood between him and the attainment of his desire. Again, supposing it were in his power to see more of her, would she ever come to care for him? She might like him as a friend, but as nothing else. Then another thought occurred to him and made him even more miserable than he was already. He had settled it with himself that she was unhappy because she was being forced into marriage

with a man old enough to be her father. Was it not also probable that some portion of her misery might be caused by the fact that, being compelled to marry D'Alvaro, she was being torn from some one to whom she had given her heart?

'In that case, I should stand no sort of chance,' Jack said to himself.

For the first time for many years his night's rest was seriously impaired. When eventually he did sleep he dreamt that he was being chased through the plantation by D'Alvaro, assisted by the German keeper, and that Inez de Montalva was calling to him from the ruins to save himself while he had time.

Next morning there was still no news from the police concerning the missing man. He telegraphed to the Liberal authorities to know if they had any tidings of him, but the only reply he received was to the effect that the stranger who had dodged his footsteps in Liverpool had managed to give them the slip. They lived, however, in the hope of soon discovering his whereabouts.

'Let's hope they will,' said Jack, with a considerable amount of impatience. 'It seems to me that upon that gentleman everything else depends.'

That morning he persuaded Dot to come with him for a walk. Leaving the house they crossed the lawn, and made their way through the shrubbery towards the little rustic bridge which spans the stream that had been so carefully searched by the police a few days before.

In taking his sister with him Jack had a definite purpose in view. Labouring as she was under weight of her anxiety it had occurred to him that nothing would be better calculated to distract her thoughts than the recital of his own woes. He set to work, therefore, and described to her the events of the previous afternoon, from the time of his meeting the doctor in the shop at Brackford to the time of his leaving the park at the invitation of the German keeper. He explained the state of his own feelings towards the girl, and his fears regarding her relationship with Monsieur d'Alvaro.

'But, Jack, are you quite serious when you say that you love this Inez de Montalva? It has all been so sudden.'

'I am as serious as I have ever been in my life,' her brother replied. 'I give you my word, Dot, that if Miss de Montalva would be my wife to-morrow I would make her such.

I have laughed at men who have talked about love at first sight, but I can say now that I most firmly and truly believe that it is possible for a man to fall in love in what one might almost call a lightning flash. But what am I to do? What can I do? We had never met really face to face until yesterday, and though I did not put the question to her, I feel convinced that D'Alvaro intends to make her his wife. If you had been a witness of her misery you would have pitied her from the bottom of your heart. Now, what am I to do? I cannot let him have her, and yet I do not see how I can win her for myself. If you could only see her, Dot, you would not wonder at my love for her.'

'I would do anything in the world, Jack, to help you,' said his sister. 'I do not see, however, what I *can* do. From what you have told me I gather that she is being closely guarded, and I should say it is quite evident that Monsieur d'Alvaro does not intend that any one shall be permitted to go near her.'

'That is my opinion exactly,' Jack answered. 'But perhaps the rule might be a little relaxed on your behalf. Could you not call and endeavour to get an interview with her?'

He had no sooner spoken than he regretted

his action. At such a time it was only natural that Dot should not feel in the humour for paying visits of ceremony, but whatever her feelings may have been she replied with a smiling face to the effect that she was quite willing to make the attempt, if by so doing she could assist matters at all. Accordingly, that afternoon, she drove over to the Castle. It may be imagined with what impatience her brother awaited her return. The minutes seemed like hours and the hours like days until he hastened out to receive her. They passed into the drawing-room together, and when Jack had carefully closed the door he inquired as to the success she had met with.

'Jack, she is lovely indeed,' said his sister. 'The description you gave me of her was not in the least exaggerated. I have never met such a beautiful creature in my life.'

'I knew you would say that,' her brother answered. 'But tell me all that occurred. Where did you see her? What did she say to you? And did she seem very unhappy?'

'My dear Jack, you must not run on so fast,' said Dot. 'I will tell you all that happened, but it must be in my own way.'

She seated herself in an easy-chair, spread her gloves in her lap and smoothed them out

as if that were a preliminary that must be accomplished.

'In the first place I drove to the Castle, as you know, and when I got there I told John to inquire if Miss de Montalva was at home. The butler seemed rather surprised that I should know her name, but when John returned to the carriage it was with the information that the lady was not receiving visitors. I thought it rather funny, as you may suppose, but left cards and drove away.'

'Then you did not see her after all,' said her brother, in a tone of deep disappointment.

'How should I know what she is like if I didn't?' returned his sister. 'Listen patiently and you shall hear. We had left the house and were half-way down the drive, when I saw a lady walking down the Court path. Her back was towards me, but I was quite sure in my own mind of her identity. I immediately stopped the carriage and got out. By walking quickly I managed to overtake her and then introduced myself. I told her how I had been up to the house to call upon her, and regretted that she was not receiving visitors. I also told her that I was your sister and mentioned the fact that you had seen her on the previous afternoon. Jack, I don't know whether I am right in saying so,

but I am not quite sure that the coincidence you mentioned to me this morning has not taken place on her side.'

'What do you mean?' Jack inquired. His heart was beating as if it would suffocate him.

'I only know that when I mentioned you to her she became very agitated. I asked her if she would come and lunch with us, but she declared that she could not do so. Her guardian does not approve of her going out anywhere. It's a terrible life for her, poor girl. She seems very unhappy. Without being too curious I endeavoured to find out some of her history, but without success. Do you know, Jack, I cannot help thinking that there is something more behind this than we imagine. If it is merely a question of marriage, why does not Monsieur d'Alvaro hurry matters forward? He would only have to obtain a special license and the matter is at an end once and for all. That she is afraid of him I am quite sure.'

'How do you know that?' Jack inquired.

'Because you should see them together,' Dot replied. 'After that you would have no sort of doubt.'

'But have you seen them together?'

'Yes, he came upon us, just as I was about

to leave her. What was more, he did not seem best pleased to see me. Miss de Montalva introduced me to him, and the look he gave me would have chilled an iceberg. I told him that I had invited his ward to luncheon, and when he heard this the expression upon his face would have frightened me had I not made up my mind to defy him.'

'"My ward is at present not accepting any invitations," he said, with marked emphasis. "Later on, if you will allow her, I am sure she will be very glad to partake of your hospitality."

'This was not encouraging,' Dot continued; 'but I did not give in. "You must find it very dull here," I remarked to her, but before she could reply her guardian had again thrust in his oar. "Miss Montalva has her own sources of amusement," he said, with what I could almost declare was a sneer upon his face. "She is accustomed to leading a quiet life, and I have no desire that her stay in England should induce her to break through the rule."

'By this time we had reached the carriage, and I was about to bid them good-bye. Just at that moment a telegraph boy made his appearance round the corner of the drive, and came to where we were standing. He

handed a message to Monsieur d'Alvaro, and stood at a little distance waiting for an answer. Having obtained my permission the tyrant opened the envelope and withdrew the contents. A heavy frown made its appearance on his brow as he read, but it was nothing to the ghastly pallor that had appeared on the face of his ward. For a moment I thought that she was about to faint, and prepared to catch her. Then D'Alvaro informed the boy that there was no answer, and thrust the message into his pocket. Seeing that I could do nothing more I bade them good-bye and drove home, feeling quite sure of two things—one that she is desperately unhappy, and the other that she lives in terror of him.'

'What can be done?' Jack inquired. 'I can't go to the house and ask to see her, and to attempt to obtain D'Alvaro's permission to speak to her would be worse than useless. At the same time it is impossible to let her go on in this miserable state. Rather than let her marry him I would run any risk in the world. Can you advise me, Dot?'

'I'm afraid I can't,' Dot replied. 'I am willing to help you, however, in whatever way I can.'

'I know that,' he answered. 'It seems selfish of me to worry you with my troubles

at such a time as this. Please Heaven, however, our affairs will come right in the end. I wish to goodness now that I had made more inquiries about Monsieur d'Alvaro. I wonder if the agents would be able to tell me anything about him? They would scarcely have advised me to take him as a tenant if they did not know more than a little about him. I'll drop them a line to-night and tell them to let me know all they can discover. That may be of assistance to us.'

Having thanked his sister for what she had done he left the drawing-room and made his way to his study to write the letter in question. That accomplished he went to the stables to inspect a horse that had gone lame, had an interview with his bailiff, smoked a couple of cigarettes as he watched the cows trailing back from the milking-pans to the meadows, across which the evening shadows were slowly falling, and then returned to the house, uncertain as to what he should do next.

Always with him was the remembrance of a pair of lustrous dark eyes that seemed to gaze into his with a look that told of the deepest trouble.

After dinner he donned a light coat, lit a cigar, and went for a walk. He found it well-

nigh impossible to stay in the house, and yet he had no definite object in going out. His one desire was to be alone with his own thoughts and to endeavour to come to some understanding with himself concerning his future actions. Passing into the highroad he walked steadily on through the village until he reached the cross-roads, one of which led from Great Brackford to the Castle. It was a lovely moonlight night, so light indeed was it that it would have been almost possible to read in it. Half a mile or so from the Castle gates there is a small inn which rejoices in the name of the Goat and Compasses. Jack had known its landlord all his life, and very often now, when out for a stroll by himself, he made a point of dropping in to have a chat with the old man. On this occasion, he stopped opposite the door as if uncertain what he should do. Then making up his mind he passed into the quaint old porch and pushed open one of the swing-doors. He had scarcely done so before he allowed it to close again. It was strange that an exclamation of surprise did not escape him, for, standing beside the counter, engaged in conversation with the landlord, was the very man who had followed him in Liverpool and whom the police had lost trace of!

CHAPTER VII

If John Trowbridge had been seized suddenly and thrown into the street, he would not have been more surprised than he was when he saw standing beside the counter, in earnest conversation with old Jacob Watson, the landlord, the man who had given him so much attention at Liverpool. For a moment he could scarcely believe the evidence of his own eyes, and yet there was plainly no doubt about it. He had not had so many opportunities of studying that individual's face without being able to recognise it when he saw it again.

'Who is he, and what on earth can he be doing here?' he asked himself, when he once more stood in the road. 'This business is growing more and more complicated every minute. Now, I wonder what would be the best thing for me to do? The police in Brackford ought to know, and yet if I go away to tell them the man may escape. On the other hand, if I send a messenger and remain here

myself it would certainly be talked about, and may lead to complications which would be as inconvenient as they are disagreeable.'

While he was turning the subject over in his mind, the two lamps of a vehicle came into view round the corner of the road.

'That should be the mail-cart,' he continued to himself, 'and if it is I think I see my way.'

It was as he supposed, and a few seconds later he was hailing the driver, who immediately brought his horse to a standstill.

'Good-evening, Williams,' he said. 'I want you to drive me into town, if you will.'

'Delighted, Mr. Trowbridge,' replied the man. 'It's a long time since I had the pleasure of taking you in, sir.'

'I'm very glad to have seen you to-night,' Jack went on. 'As a matter of fact, I'm in a great hurry.'

Just then he espied a small boy coming along the footpath. It was the night of choir practice, and he was on his way home from the church. Jack called him up.

'Look here, Tommy,' he said, 'I want you to do something for me. Do you think you can hold your tongue?'

'Lor' bless me, yes, sir,' replied the youth,

who was the son of a dairyman at the Cross Roads Farm. 'What am I to do, sir?'

'I want you to watch a man who is in the inn there, and, if he comes out, follow him and tell me where he goes. You mustn't let him know what you are doing. If you do it properly, you shall have half a crown.'

'I'll do it, sir,' said the boy, with alacrity. 'What's the man like?'

'Come to the door and I'll show you,' Jack returned.

Taking the boy with him, he once more entered the porch. The individual was standing at the counter, and, as his face was half-turned towards the door, it was possible for the lad to scrutinise it carefully.

'Do you think you will know him?' Jack inquired, when they were once more in the road.

'Yes, sir. If he comes out, I'll follow him wherever he goes. Shall I come up to the Croft to tell you, sir?'

'No, I'll meet you here. I'm going into Brackford, and I shall be back in half an hour. If I were you, I should go across to the other side of the road and sit in the shadow of the hedge. If you have occasion to follow the man, don't get too close to him—or you'll

rouse his suspicions, and then he'll take you round the countryside. Moreover, whatever you do, say nothing about it to any one else.'

Having given the boy these instructions, and watched him seat himself in the place indicated, Jack made his way to the mail-cart and took his place beside the driver. When he was seated, the latter whipped up his horse and they proceeded towards the town at a pace that could scarcely have been less than twelve miles an hour. Before proceeding to the police-station, he called at the principal hotel, which was also a posting establishment, and ordered a dogcart with a fast horse to be immediately got ready for him. Then he went on to see the superintendent. To that astonished individual he told the discovery he had made.

'I'll send a policeman out at once,' said the official, when Jack had finished. 'But what can the man be doing at such an outlandish place as the Goat and Compasses? It isn't as if it's a public-house near your own residence.'

'The whole thing's a mystery to me,' answered Jack. 'It's a strange thing that he should have followed me about in Liverpool,

and now turn up here. What do you propose doing?'

'In the first place, as I have said, send a man and find out, if possible, where he's staying. He must sleep somewhere to-night, and if we can find out where, we may be able to discover more. If you'll excuse me for a moment, I'll see what men are in.'

He left the room, to return a few minutes later with a smart-looking young man in plain clothes.

'Sefton,' he said, addressing him, 'you will go out with Mr. Trowbridge to the Goat and Compasses Inn, and if there is a certain man there, whom Mr. Trowbridge will point out to you, you will do your best to find out who he is, and where he is staying. Then come back and report matters to me.'

On leaving the police-station they made their way to the hotel, and a few minutes later were bowling along the highroad towards the hostelry Jack had quitted a short time before. The driver of the dogcart was ordered to walk his horse up and down, a hundred yards or so away, while Jack, accompanied by the policeman, approached the house in question. Much to the former's disappointment, the boy was no longer in his position beneath

the hedge, and from this Jack gathered that the man had quitted the inn. Entering the porch, he peered into the room through the crack of the door. With the exception of old Jacob Watson, who was standing at the door of the little room behind the counter, smoking his long churchwarden and talking to his buxom wife, who could plainly be seen at her needlework within, the bar was empty.

'We had better go in and make inquiries,' said Jack. 'The man is not there, but Watson may be able to tell us something about him.'

They accordingly entered, and approached the counter.

'Good-evening, Watson,' Jack began. 'I hope you are well, Mrs. Watson?'

'Very well, and thank you, sir,' the lady replied. 'You yourself couldn't look better. It isn't often we have the pleasure of seeing you now, sir.'

'I have nothing to bring me this way,' Jack replied. 'But I must get to business. I have come to make some inquiries, Jacob.'

'I hope I can answer them, sir. My old head is not what it used to be, but, if you will be pleased to tell me what you want to know, I'll do my best to answer.'

'I want to learn all I can about a man who

was in here this evening. Since I have not seen him in the neighbourhood before, I can only presume that he is a stranger.'

'A gent as was wearing a black hat and a red necktie, sir, might it be? A smallish man, sir, with a bit of a limp when he walked.'

'That's the man,' said Jack. 'Now, as I am very much interested in him, I want you to tell me all you know about him.'

'That's very easily done, sir,' said Jacob; 'because there's not much to tell. I never set eyes on him until to-night, and then he hadn't got much to say for hisself. He's a foreigner, I should make bold to believe, though he talks English as well as I do.'

'Do you know where he is staying?'

'I haven't the least notion, sir. He came in at eight, and went away about a quarter of an hour ago.'

'In which direction?'

'I couldn't say, sir. You see, I wasn't very much interested in him. He took two drops of gin and a cigar, and beyond talking about the weather and the crops, we didn't have much conversation. Now I come to think of it, I remember that he mentioned your name, and seemed a goodish bit interested when I

told him that my missus had been your nurse. I don't think he's seen you before, sir, for he asked what you was like.'

Jack offered no comment upon this intelligence. He had the best of reasons for knowing that the man was quite familiar with his face.

'Well, I'm afraid we shan't find out very much more here,' he said, turning to the policeman. 'We must try to see that boy and hear what he has discovered.'

After requesting the innkeeper to keep his own counsel regarding their visit, and when they had partaken of some refreshment for the good of the house, they bade him good-bye and went out into the road once more. Any doubt they might have had as to the direction they should take was set at rest by the appearance of the youth in question. For the reason that he was very much out of breath, it was evident that he had been running.

'Well, my lad, what have you found out?' asked Jack. 'Did you follow the man?'

'Yes, sir, I did,' returned the boy, 'and I wish I'd never set eyes on him.'

'What do you mean? What did he do to you?'

'He's a great ugly coward, sir, and I kicked

his shins for him. If father had a' been there, he would have got it, I know.'

'Now tell me your story more plainly, my lad,' said the policeman. 'You did as this gentleman told you, and followed the man away from the house? Which way did he go?'

'Down there,' said the boy, pointing down the road. 'As soon as he came out, I got up from where I was sitting, and set off after him. Then he crossed the road and turned down Brook Lane. From Brook Lane he went across the meadows by the stile. It was so dark under the trees by the stile that I thought I had missed him, and was wondering what I had better do next, when he steps out from under a bush and catches hold of me by my collar.

'"What's your game following me, you young imp?" he said, and caught me a clump under the ear.

'I told him as how I was going home, and he said as how I was a "young liar" and that, if I followed him any more, he'd beat me into a jelly. Then he started hitting me again, and I kicked his shins and then ran away, but not so far as how I couldn't keep my eye on him.'

'And where did he go?'

'He climbed over the stile and then went along under the park fencin', as if he was goin' to the home-farm of the Castle. I ran after him, but when I got to the end of the lane he was gone, and I couldn't see anything of him. It's my belief, sir, that he went into the park plantation, for I'd swear, sir, that I heard the gate go click, the one that has just been opened, sir, just as I turned the corner.'

This put such a complexion upon the affair, that Jack did not know what to think. Improbable though it might seem, it was still probable that the man might have entered the grounds of the Castle, but, if so, what did his presence there mean, and what association had it with his mysterious behaviour at Liverpool?

He rewarded the boy for his trouble, and then turned to the policeman.

'I don't see what else we can do,' he said. 'We have no charge to bring against the man, and we have no sort of excuse for making inquiries at the Castle. The fact that the man was on the lookout to discover if he were being followed, looks suspicious, and that's about everything we can say. All we can do now, is to go home to bed and to wait

and see what fresh developments of the case come to light.'

'You don't suppose, sir,' said the policeman, 'that this man had anything to do with the disappearance of Mr. Ormby, do you?'

'I am getting beyond thinking anything,' said Jack. 'It's the most extraordinary business that I have ever had to do with. Now, you had better take the dogcart and drive back to the station. I shall walk home across the fields.'

When he had seen the cart disappear he made his way by the meadow path towards his own residence. If the truth must be told, he was more troubled in his mind than he cared to admit. If this man were really hiding at the Castle, what association had it with Inez de Montalva? It did not seem to him possible that D'Alvaro could have had anything to do with Ormby's disappearance. That, he felt, was out of the question. In that case, however, if the boy had not made a mistake, why was the stranger at the Castle? Coincidences are bad things to play with, and, let one once become suspicious, there is no saying to what they may not lead. The fact of the stranger being at the Castle troubled him beyond measure.

When he reached the Croft he described to Dot what had taken place that evening, after which he bade her good-night and retired to his room.

Once there, he regarded himself in the looking-glass.

'This won't do at all,' he muttered. 'What with poor little Dot, Inez, and old Jim, I shall be in a lunatic asylum in another fortnight.'

After breakfast next morning, he retired to his study and endeavoured to work the problem out. He placed on paper a record of all that had transpired, but, after giving it much attention, he was compelled to admit that he was no nearer understanding it than he had been before. For the remainder of the morning he pottered about at home, scarcely conscious of what he was doing, but merely desirous of filling up time. At one time he was tempted to go to the Castle in order to find out if the man were really there, but a few moments' reflection was sufficient to shew him the folly of such a course. It could not possibly do any good, while it was probable it might do a vast amount of harm. So far as he could see, the only course left open to him was to wait as patiently as he knew how, until he should hear from St. Vincent whether Ormby

was on board the *Marwhal* or not. At the earliest this could not be for another couple of days.

During the afternoon, he received a note from D'Alvaro, in which the latter regretted to inform him that he found after all it was impossible for him to take the young keeper into his service.

'All things considered, it is perhaps as well,' said Jack to himself. 'It might have been thought, later on, that I had got him the situation for reasons of my own.'

He accordingly wrote a polite note in reply, and then dismissed the matter from his mind.

'If only I could manage to obtain one more interview with Miss de Montalva,' he said to himself, 'I am quite sure I should be able to set matters at rest. But how can I possibly do it? Even if I knew I should find her at the ruin, I don't see how I could get there. That gate is kept locked, and it is very evident that his keepers have received orders to keep their eyes open for intruders. There is old Mrs. Penney at the lodge, now, she might be able to help me, but I shouldn't like to get her into trouble.'

Jack was seated under a shady tree on the lawn while he was indulging in this reverie.

He had scarcely mentioned the old lodge-keeper's name ere his butler made his appearance, to inform him that Mrs. Penney desired to see him.

'Just ask her to walk over here,' said Jack, and in a few minutes later the woman stood before him.

'Well, Mrs. Penney,' he said, 'what can I do for you? Nothing wrong with the family, I hope?'

'No, sir,' she replied, 'except that we are all a bit worried. I thought it best to come and tell you at once, sir, seeing the number of years we've served you and yours.'

'What is it you have to tell me?'

'That we've left the lodge, sir. Mr. d'Alvaro has turned us out.'

Jack gave a start of surprise. He had not anticipated this.

'What has caused him to do that?' he inquired. 'I know you and your husband well enough to feel sure that you have given him no reason for getting rid of you.'

'I don't know why he's done it at all,' the woman replied. 'Unless 'tis to make room for one of those other foreigners that he's got about the place. We only knew it this morning, when his butler came down to tell

us that we were to go. I don't say, though, that he hasn't behaved very generous. He 's taken a house for us in the village and given us twenty pounds, besides the cost of our moving. Still, that doesn't make up to us for the loss of the little home where we have been so comfortable.'

'I 'm more than sorry to hear this,' Jack replied. 'However, I 'm very much afraid it is a matter quite out of my range.'

'I can quite see that, sir,' the woman answered. 'But both my husband and I thought that 'twas only right that you should know at once.'

'You did quite the right thing. If there is any way we can, help you—you know quite well, I think, that Miss Dot and I will do it?'

'I am very grateful to you, sir,' the woman returned.

She was about to take her departure, when Jack stopped her. He thought it just possible she might be able to give him some information upon the subject that lay nearest his heart.

'Just one moment before you go,' Mrs. Penney,' he said. 'Do you know anything about the young lady who is Monsieur d'Alvaro's ward?'

'I'm afraid I can't tell you anything about any of 'em, sir. There were never such people for keeping themselves to themselves. Of course, I have seen the young lady walking in the park, but she has never been near the lodge, to my knowledge. One thing I am certain of, and that is that she has never passed through the gates since they have been in the place. My good man, though, has seen her walking about the plantations by herself. She seems unhappy, poor dear, but what the reason of it is I cannot say. It's my belief that there's some mystery about all of them.'

Jack saw that D'Alvaro's treatment had roused the old lady's resentment, and that, for the future, she was prepared to think as badly of them as possible.

When she had left him he strolled into the house and told his sister the news. Her indignation was even stronger than his own.

'What a shame to turn the poor old things out!' she said. 'I should not be surprised, however, at anything *that* man might do. I disliked his face from the moment that I first saw it. I wish he had never come into the neighbourhood.'

'That is putting it rather strongly,' Jack remarked. 'But, like you, I am exceedingly

sorry that he should have acted in this fashion. It will not go to make him popular in the village.'

He dropped into a chair as he spoke, and, picking up a book from the table, endeavoured to interest himself in it. But the effort was not attended with success. At last he threw the volume down and rose to his feet.

'Dot,' he said, 'by hook or crook, I must see Miss de Montalva again. Even at the risk of offending her I must endeavour to learn from her own lips the reason of all this mystery. But how am I to do it? After the cool manner in which my advances were received the other day I do not want to go up to the house, and even were I to do so, I feel sure I should have no opportunity of seeing her. The park is so carefully patrolled by his keepers, that to attempt to obtain an interview there would be equally impossible. If only there were some place we could talk together without fear of interruption I am certain she would tell me the secret of all the trouble.'

Dot was silent for a few moments.

'I have it!' she said at last. 'I wonder if he knows the secret of the grotto?'

'By Jove!' her brother replied. 'The very

place. I have never mentioned the fact of its existence to any one, and it is almost certain they have not discovered it. But how are we to let her know of it?'

'That, of course, I cannot tell you. I must leave it to your own ingenuity.'

'Well, I'll risk it,' Jack remarked. 'I'll walk over now and see if it is not possible to discover a way into the park. If I can have a few minutes with her it will go hard if I cannot arrange a meeting in the grotto. My own good luck should do the rest.'

Ten minutes later he might have been observed crossing the meadows in the direction of the Castle. From the manner in which he lashed out at the nettles by the side of the footpath, it would appear that he was in a by no means pleasant temper. After a while he left the meadows, climbed the stile, and stood in the highroad, in which was the small inn before mentioned. By this time he had quite made up his mind as to what he should do. At any cost he was prepared to enter the park and to trust to his luck to attain an exit again.

He might have been observed, a quarter of an hour later, standing before the gate through which, according to the boy's story,

the mysterious man from Liverpool had disappeared. It had suddenly struck him that a short distance down the road, a hundred yards or so from the gate, there was an ancient elm-tree, the slanting trunk of which might be very well used as a means of entering the park. He endeavoured to peer through the fencing, but without discovering anything of importance.

'At any rate, I am going over,' he said to himself, as he came up to the tree, and, taking hold of a low bough, swung himself up by it. From the bough to the top of the fence was only a few feet, and it was quite an easy matter for him to scramble over. Then, for the second time since they had been occupied by the stranger, he stood within his own grounds. Picking his way carefully, in order that his movements might not attract attention, he proceeded in the direction of the ruin.

To Jack's joy, when he arrived there, he discovered Miss de Montalva seated in the place where he had last seen her. On seeing him before her, she rose with a little cry.

'Oh, why are you here?' she said, her hands clasped as if in entreaty. 'I told you the other day how dangerous it was.'

'Miss de Montalva,' Jack replied, 'I am

here for the reason that I must have a short conversation with you. I implore you to listen to me. Think what you like—but I assure you that I have come as your friend. Leave this spot and cross the park. Follow the south side of the lake, pass over the bridge, and then turn to your left hand. You will then find the ground rising; go on until you come to a small wood. In the wood you will see what appears to be a thickly-timbered knoll. Half-way up this you will find a summer-house built in the shape of a small Roman temple. Enter it and press the centre of the panel in the wall exactly facing the door. It will open, and a flight of steps will reveal themselves. Descend these, and go into the room you will find at the bottom. I will join you there.'

'No, no,' she said, 'I cannot do it.'

'You do not know what you say,' he answered. 'It is most necessary, for both our sakes, that we should have a talk together. All my happiness is at stake. In half an hour we can settle everything. I implore you, by all you hold sacred, to come.'

She looked him fearlessly in the face.

'Very well,' she said, 'I will come!'

CHAPTER VIII

When Jack Trowbridge had seen the girl he loved hastening through the wood towards the rendezvous he had indicated, he turned and made his way back to the road, leaving the park by the way he had entered. He knew that it would be a fatal step for he himself to attempt to reach the grotto by way of the plantation. A keeper would be almost certain to discover him, and by so doing prevent the interview to which he was so anxiously looking forward. There was, however, another route by which he could reach the place in question. This would necessitate a sharp walk and a still sharper climb, but he was ready for either.

In something under a quarter of an hour he had reached the further end of the park, and was standing on the small stone bridge which spans the stream, which is the only outlet of the lake, and which has its source in the grotto to which the girl had preceded him. The park wall formed one side of the

bridge and was too high for him to climb, even if he desired to do so. He had, however, a better plan in his mind, and as soon as he reached the bridge he hastened to put it into execution. Descending the bank on the opposite side to that by which he had approached the bridge, he made his way up the shallow stream, until he reached the iron grille that his father had placed there to prevent the ingress of trespassers.

'Heaven send that D'Alvaro has not had it repaired,' he said to himself, as he approached it. 'If he has, I am done for.'

Turning to the right-hand wall of the arch he examined the spot where the iron was let into the brickwork. To his joy he discovered that the defect he remembered as a boy still existed, and by the use of a little exertion he was able to push the iron out of its socket and to squeeze himself through, replacing it after he had done so. That accomplished, the rest was plain sailing. He had only to make his way along the bed of the stream, which was in no place more than three inches deep, in order to reach the foot of the hill which contained the grotto. He had no fear of his presence being detected, for the reason that the banks were high on either side, and densely

lined with undergrowth. Feeling secure, therefore, against molestation, he lost no time in pushing forward. He was too full of anxiety to see Miss de Montalva even to think of what he should say when they should stand face to face. It was his first experience of falling in love, and it seemed as if the great god, Cupid, now intended to punish him for his dilatoriness in worshipping at his shrine.

On reaching the foot of the hill he followed the somewhat intricate path up the slope, with which he had been familiar since he was a boy. This at last brought him to the little temple, as it was called, though in reality it was a small summer-house. From it a magnificent view of the surrounding country could be obtained. The place had been built by Jack's great-grandfather, an eccentric man, who had come perilously near impoverishing the estate. Entering the summer-house he pressed heavily on the panel opposite the door. With a groan it yielded to his touch, disclosing a flight of steps which looked as if they led to the bowels of the earth. He passed through, closed the door after him, and descended, wondering whether Miss de Montalva had had the courage to enter such an uncanny place. Down and down he went, one hand resting on the

dripping wall. Ahead of him he could see the light of the grotto, but as yet nothing of the girl.

Eventually he stood in the grotto itself. It was an extraordinary place, and the more remarkable since it was the creation of human hands. Taken altogether it was more like a large cave than anything else. In the roof was a small opening, through which were admitted light and air. In the wall opposite to that through which one entered, was the spring which fed the lake, and which was responsible for the small stream to which allusion has already been made. It was a dreary sort of place, but safer than any other Jack could have hit upon for the interview. In the half gloom he did not for a moment see Miss de Montalva, but presently he was able to make out her form near the spring on the further side. He hastened forward to greet her.

'For a time at least we are safe,' he said, 'and I have so much to say to you.'

'I cannot think what you can have to say,' she replied. 'I implore you not to frighten me.'

'I have no desire to do that,' he answered. 'If I could have my way, you should never know a care in this world.'

The blush that suffused her cheek was sufficient evidence to show that he was understood.

'Please tell me what you have to say and let me go,' she faltered. 'My absence will most certainly be noticed.'

'I will not detain you long, but we *must* have this talk together. Miss de Montalva, this is only the second time I have spoken to you. I have but seen you three times, and yet I seem to have known you always. Is it so impossible for us to put away for the time being the conventionalities of the world, and to speak to each other as we feel?'

'I am afraid I do not understand you,' she returned. 'It may be my fault, but——'

'Allow me to make my meaning clearer,' Jack continued, speaking quickly, as if time were a matter of the most vital importance. 'What I want is to be allowed to tell you exactly what is in my mind. I did my best the other day to convince you that my one desire was to prove myself your friend. To do that I would run any risk and make any sacrifice. But in this petty world we are hemmed in on every side by conventionalities. Some people would say that, for the reason we have only met twice, it would be impossible

for me to have learnt to love you. Yet Heaven knows that I do!'

She gave a little cry of alarm.

'Oh, you must not say that,' she said. 'I cannot listen to you.'

'You both can and will,' he continued impetuously. 'I must tell you all while I have time. We may not have another opportunity of meeting. Inez, I swear to you that I love you! As long as I live I shall never love another woman. You are all in all to me. It was Fate that brought us together, and I knew from the moment that I looked into your face at the railway station, on the evening of your arrival here, that you would be my one and only love. Under other and happier circumstances I should not have spoken so soon, but as matters stand now I cannot help myself. Inez, I have said I love you! Set me any task you please to prove it.'

Her face had become deathly pale and she was trembling in every limb.

'Mr. Trowbridge,' she said, in a voice that was but little louder than a whisper, 'I am unhappy enough as it is. If, as you say, you desire to help me, spare me further unhappiness.'

'You do not mean that you are resigning

yourself to the thought of marriage with this man?' Jack inquired, in amazement.

'Marriage? I? What do you mean? I have no thought of marrying any one.'

'But D'Alvaro? Are you not a prisoner here until you will consent to marry him?'

'Mr. Trowbridge,' she returned, 'did I not feel sure that you are really in earnest I should believe that your desire was to insult me!'

'But you know better than that. It seems, however, that I have been blind, that I have been putting my own construction on things, and that that construction has been wrong. Monsieur d'Alvaro informed me that you were his ward. I gathered, from the fact that you were to all intents a prisoner here, that he was endeavouring to coerce you into a marriage with himself. I am thankful indeed that it is not so. You may say that it is no business of mine, but after what I have already said, you must surely see that it means more to me than anything else in the world. Will you trust me with your secret, and tell me the meaning of your presence in this place? You are not allowed to leave it, and your guardian will not permit you to receive visitors. Worse than all, you are continually unhappy. There must be something behind it all. If you cannot

return my love, will you not confide in me, and let me endeavour to help you?'

'Impossible!' she answered, wringing her hands. 'My lips are sealed. To do what you ask of me would be to break my heart—if, indeed, it is not already broken.'

She dropped on to the seat beside the spring, and hid her face in her hands.

'Is it impossible, then,' said Jack, 'for me to be of service to you, impossible for me to render the help that I would give with more than thankfulness?'

'Oh! but you do not know. I cannot express to you, however, my gratitude for your goodness. I do firmly believe that you are my friend.'

'More than your friend. The man who loves you with all the devotion of which a human being is capable!'

'Hush! you must not speak like that. I say that I do believe you would help me, but I cannot permit it. There are others concerned, and to reveal my secret to you would be to bring trouble, perhaps even worse, upon them.'

'You do not trust me, then? You think I would betray you?'

'No, no, not that,' she answered quickly.

'You are a gentleman, and would keep silence were it necessary.'

'I would swear to you by any oath you please that, without your permission, no word of what you say to me shall pass my lips. Why, then, fear to confide in me? If I cannot help you in any other way, I may at least be able to advise you.'

She rose from the seat and began to pace the sandy floor of the cave. At last she paused.

'Mr. Trowbridge,' she said, 'if I were to tell you that my secret might involve you in ruin, that it might mean the destruction of your home, the death of your sister, and your inevitable murder, would you be so anxious to hear it?'

'Yes,' he answered fearlessly. 'Even were it possible for such a thing to happen, it would be my earnest wish to help you. Heaven knows, I would not have anything happen to Dot if I could prevent it, but I am perfectly sure she would agree with me to risk that in order to help you.'

Once more she walked up and down the cave. Then she continued:

'At the present moment I doubt if there is another person in the world who so badly

stands in need of a helping hand as I do. You have come to me with your offer of assistance, and you will never know how strong the temptation is to me to avail myself of it. The load I am carrying is more than I can bear. Think, then, what it means to me when you come forward and offer to relieve me of some of it.'

'I ask nothing more than to be allowed to share your trouble with you.'

'Some day you may regret.'

'Never! That would be impossible!'

'Then I will tell you.'

He did not reply, but seated himself on the bench beside her. For upwards of a minute the only sound to be heard was the bubbling of the stream and the twittering of a bird in the bushes above the opening. Then Miss de Montalva began:

'When I spoke to you in the park the other day, I told you, as you may remember, that my father was a Spaniard and my mother an Englishwoman. My father was a man of great wealth; my mother also owned a considerable amount of property in this country. She died, when my brother—there are only two of us—was born. Had she lived, it is possible that affairs would never have gone so ill with us.

After her death my father became morose and sullen, neglected his friends of happier days, and was continually absent from home. My brother and I were sent to England to school, and it was not until three years ago that we saw our father again. It was then that I noticed a terrible change in him. He had once been a tall, handsome man; he was then but a wreck of his former self. As before, he was continually away from home, and when he came back to it he often brought with him strange men who seldom left the house during their stay, and even when they did it was only under cover of night. It was not long before I began to suspect that he was engaged in some revolutionary plot, and my suspicions were unfortunately confirmed. What was worse, I found out that my brother, who was then but a very young man, was being led by his teaching—for they were always together—into the same life. Now, my brother and I loved each other as few brothers and sisters do. He was only twenty-one, a frank, generous lad, who would have lived at peace with all the world, but for the teachings of those who should have been the last to instil such thoughts into his mind.'

'Have you any idea of the nature of the

plots in which they were engaged?' asked Jack.

She shook her head.

'I was never allowed to know anything about it,' she replied. 'But when a man, who only a few months before had been hiding in our house, was arrested by the police and sent to prison for conspiring against the Government, my suspicions were confirmed, and I began to understand something of what was going on around me. From that day forward my life was one long terror. Day and night I was in agony lest Manuel, my brother, or my father, should be arrested. Whenever they left the house, I feared lest I should never see them again. Then my father was taken suddenly ill, and almost before we knew the case was so serious, he was dead. Making a desire for travel my excuse, I persuaded Manuel to give up the old home. He did so, and we set off for Italy. It was the first time I had visited it, and in that wonderland of art I forgot, for the time being, my fears. It was not long, however, before they were renewed. We were in Rome at the time, and it was there that I first met Monsieur d'Alvaro. How my brother became acquainted with him I cannot say. He has always been very reticent on

that point. It is certain, however, that they soon became very great friends, and, for this reason, I was left very much to myself. My love of painting at this period stood me in good stead, otherwise I do not know what I should have done. As it was, my time was, for the greater part, spent in the galleries, where, at least, I could find some distraction from my thoughts. You must bear in mind, Mr. Trowbridge, that I understood that my brother had practically given up any association he might have had with this Secret Society in Spain.'

'But am I to understand that your brother *was* a member of a Secret Society?' Jack inquired.

'That is a question I cannot answer,' she said. 'He may have been, or he may not. I have never heard it said that he was, nor has he ever said anything in my presence that would lead me to suppose so. One thing, however, is very plain. That is, that D'Alvaro has a very strong influence over my brother.'

'You do not like him?'

'I hate him,' she answered, her eyes flashing; 'only I dare not let him see it. But let me continue my story. As I have said, we were in Rome. One day Manuel was called away

to Naples, and from what he told me I gathered that he did not know when he should be back. At last, however, I received a telegram from him informing me that he proposed to return on the Thursday following. This was good news indeed, but I little dreamt of the misery that was to follow. He came, and you may imagine how rejoiced I was to see him. I thought he looked ill and careworn, but he assured me that he was quite well. That evening he took me to the opera, but I noticed that he paid little or no attention to what went on upon the stage. As we left the theatre, afterwards, a beggar, whom I had never seen before, brushed against him, and, without a word of explanation, thrust a note into his hand. Manuel placed it in his pocket and walked on in silence. It was only when we reached our own sitting-room at the hotel that I saw how white his face was. He went to the window, and, opening it, stepped into the balcony outside. The letter he had just read had dropped from his hand to the floor. Resolved at any hazard to find out what was troubling him, I picked it up and looked at it. To my astonishment there was nothing on it but "Twelve" in Roman numerals, and a few lines and half circles, which were quite unin-

telligible to me. When he entered the room, I implored him to tell me what was the matter.

'"Nothing, nothing," he answered testily. "You must not attempt to pry into my affairs. I have things to think of which I cannot discuss with you."

'I was so hurt at this rebuff, coming at a time when I was so racked with anxiety on his account, that I left the room without another word and went sorrowfully to bed. His room was next to mine, and for nearly half the night I heard him pacing up and down in it. My heart ached for him, but when he was in that state it was useless to argue with him. When I left my chamber in the morning he had gone out, and it was not until late that evening that he returned. When he did so his face was like that of a dying man. I implored him to consult a doctor, but he would not hear of such a thing.

'"I want no doctor," he cried. "My malady is of the mind and not of the body. Take away my thoughts and I should be myself again!"

'"You will not tell me what your thoughts are," I said. "It is cruel of you, Manuel, to treat me so. You know that I love you better than any one else in the world, and yet, when you are in trouble, you will not let me

comfort you. You are not in any danger, are you?" He gave me a look of surprise, and, when he spoke again, I could see that he was angry.

'"Why should I be in danger?" he asked, "Rome is very well policed, I am given to understand."

'"Too well policed for some people, I expect," I returned, with meaning. Then, careless of his anger, I asked him outright if he were a member of any Secret Society.

'"You had better not put such questions," he replied. "The less you know about those matters the better for both of us. I should have thought you would have learnt that lesson by this time. Please never ask me such a thing again."'

'But he did not deny it,' said Jack. 'You must have been convinced in your own mind, then, that he was still dabbling in conspiracies?'

'I was as certain as I could be of anything,' the girl replied. 'But let me continue. It was on the Tuesday following the scene I have just described that the climax came. According to custom I had been spending the greater part of the day at one of the galleries, doing my best to copy a picture that has always had a great fascination for me. As Manuel had

told me that he should not return until late, I did not make my way back to the hotel until it was too dark to go on working. Then I ascended to our sitting-room, half expecting to find him there. He was absent, but on the table was a letter addressed to me in his handwriting. With a terrible foreboding in my heart, I opened it. I can recall every word of it as well as if I had only received it a few moments since.

'"My beloved sister," it began. "By the time you receive this I shall be far away. Whether we shall ever meet again is more than I can say. Forgive me if of late I have been a poor companion, but I have had much to think of and to worry about. I beg of you to pay particular attention to what I am now about to say. Within a few hours of your receiving this letter, D'Alvaro will come to you. Do exactly as he wishes; on your obedience to him may depend my life. Thank Heaven, you will not want for money. So long as you obey D'Alvaro, all will be well. As for me, it would have been better had I never been born, for of all men upon this earth, the most miserable at this moment is the brother who loves you,

'"MANUEL DE MONTALVA."'

'A terrible letter for a sister to receive!' said Jack sympathetically. 'What construction did you place upon it?'

'At first I did not know what to think,' she replied. 'I was stunned by it. For the time being I was almost beside myself with anxiety. I read his letter over and over again, and every time that I did so, I derived a different impression from it. At first I thought that Manuel was contemplating suicide. I knew his wild, impetuous temper, and I thought that some sudden trouble might have unhinged his brain. Then, with the remembrance of bygone days before me, I came to the conclusion that he was in league with one of the old Societies to which he must have been elected a member during my father's lifetime. One moment's consideration will show you the position I was placed in. To apply for help to the police was impossible, for I did not know upon what work he was engaged. To have gone to them might have aroused suspicion in the minds of the heads of the Society, for I did not know but that he, or, for that matter I myself, were not being watched. There was no one else to whom I could apply. From his letter, it was easy for me to see that his danger was a great one. Nothing, however, will ever convince

me that, if he were doing wrong, it was intentional.'

'I can quite believe that,' Jack replied, and he meant what he said.

'And yet before me always was the fact that he appeared to be ashamed of some part he was being compelled to play. What that part was, I, of course, had no notion. I had, however, a suspicion that was like the most terrible dream to me, by day and night. I can only wonder now that my brain has retained its equilibrium.'

'And D'Alvaro?'

'He made his appearance as my brother told me he would do. When the servant announced him, he entered the room as suave, and as well-dressed, as you have always seen him. He informed me that he had been commissioned by my brother to take care of me, and to look after my welfare until the latter should return. I asked him where my brother had gone, but he professed ignorance upon the subject. Whether he really knows or not, I cannot say, but no entreaty on my part could induce him to commit himself. Later he suggested that we should leave Rome for Paris, and, bearing in mind what Manuel had written me, I offered no opposition.'

'And in due course you reached that city? May I ask what happened then?'

'We remained there three days, and then crossed the Channel to England. I can only presume that arrangements must have been made beforehand with your agent, since we travelled direct to Great Brackford.'

'And then it was that I came into your life?' said Jack.

CHAPTER IX

'I KNOW now,' said Inez, 'that it was, indeed, a fortunate day for me when you came into my life, for I feel sure that I can trust you. I should not be telling you this strange story unless I could.'

'I thank Heaven you *are* trusting me,' said Jack. 'You must have suffered terribly. How little I dreamt on the night when I first saw you alighting from the train at Great Brackford that you had been through so much. Fate has indeed been good to me, in so much as she has allowed me to be, what I certainly believe I am, your protector. But pray tell me one thing, how has D'Alvaro behaved towards you? Has he let anything slip that would lead you to suppose that he knows anything of your brother's real errand?'

'Not a word; at least, so far as any definite statement goes, but he gave me one very significant piece of advice, and by that I judge everything else. On the day that we left

Rome he led me to understand that my brother was being employed on a very difficult mission, and not only that, but that I was, so to speak, a hostage in his hands. So long as I remained with him all would be well, but immediately I made any attempt to leave him, or, in other words, to escape, my brother's life would assuredly pay the penalty. He has informed me, times out of number, that he himself was not a participator in this plot, but that my brother had got himself into difficulties, and that, until he met his obligations (that is the way he put it), I was in his hands as a security. Neither in Paris nor in London was I allowed to speak to any one; the closest watch was kept upon me, and even when we arrived at this place, I had no knowledge of our ultimate destination.'

'This is the most singular story I have ever heard in my life,' said Jack. 'Poor girl, I do not wonder that you are unhappy.'

'Ah! I thought you would say that,' she replied, with a feeble attempt at a smile. 'What can I do? I am to all intents and purposes a prisoner. They have what they call gamekeepers here, but they are in reality my guards. I am not allowed to see any one from the outside world, nor to hold communications

with them. I must not leave the park, and even inside it I am being constantly spied upon. Worse than all is the knowledge that my brother must be in a very real danger, either from the people with whom he is associated, or the authorities of the country in which he is carrying out what I am convinced is a desperate mission, otherwise they would not have seized upon me. What that mission is I do not know—I dare not even think. It may be only a comparatively harmless conspiracy to change the governor of a province, or to release a man from prison; but the fact of my being detained here leads me to suppose the worst.'

She paused for a moment and then walked away from him. It was very evident that she was labouring under the influence of a most powerful emotion. More than once she passed her hand across her eyes, as if she were endeavouring to shut out a painful thought. At last she came back to Jack and stood before him, looking down at him.

'Mr. Trowbridge,' she said, 'can you guess the thought that is in my mind?'

'Yes, I think I can,' he answered. 'Nay, I am sure. So many terrible things have happened in Europe lately that you fear——'

He paused—unable to proceed further. To put into words the thought that was in his mind was almost like striking her a blow, and his whole being revolted at the mere idea of giving her pain.

'Yes, I know what you think,' she answered. 'But he would not do it; of that I am sure. My brother Manuel, the kindest and gentlest of men, whose only thought was to do good to others, it is not possible that he would even think of such a thing. I am sure, if you knew him, you would agree with me.'

'I am certain of that,' said Jack fervently. 'Your brother would not stoop so low. But we must not waste time. Do you really mean to tell me that you are detained here as a hostage, and that, if the poor lad does not carry out the errand that has been forced upon him, you will be called upon to pay the penalty? If you really thought that, I should implore you to leave to-night.'

'I could not do it,' was her answer. 'I am convinced that they are holding me as hostage for him, and that, were I to run away, it would mean his death. What would you advise me to do?'

It is not often in a man's life that he finds himself called upon to decide such a question

as Jack Trowbridge had put to him then, and for a moment he was at a loss how to answer it. It was plain to him that the girl he loved was in a position of the greatest danger. It was quite certain that she would not leave D'Alvaro while she thought that her brother's safety depended upon her remaining with him. Yet to permit her to do so was to risk her life and to utterly destroy his own happiness.

'Have you any sort of idea to what country your brother went when he left Italy?' he inquired.

'No,' she replied; 'I have not the least notion.'

'And how long is it since he left you?'

'Three weeks ago next Wednesday,' was her reply. 'I have implored Monsieur d'Alvaro to tell me what he knows, but during all that time he has persistently refused.'

'The scoundrel!' muttered Jack. 'Now, is there anything more you can tell me?'

'Nothing,' she answered. 'I have told you all my miserable story.'

'And from this moment I am going to devote all my energies to helping you,' he returned. Then a thought occurred to him, and he told her of the man who had shadowed him in Liverpool, and who he now believed to be

living on the place—if not actually a member of D'Alvaro's household. He described him as closely as possible, and asked her if she recognised him.

'You are speaking of Pedro Garcia, I feel sure,' she answered promptly. 'He accompanied us from Rome, but has been away on business lately. What possible reason could he have had for following you about like that?'

'That is a question I am as unable to answer as you are,' said Jack. 'One thing, however, is certain. It makes the whole affair doubly serious.'

He then informed her of Jim Ormby's disappearance and of the anonymous letter he had received. Was this Pedro Garcia the man who had written that letter, and, if so, what had his object been in sending him to Liverpool? Also was he the individual who was responsible for Ormby's disappearance? These were important questions, but they were also questions which at present it was impossible for him to answer. That he was not the man who had walked away with Ormby on that eventful night was quite certain, for the groom's evidence had proved conclusively that that person was tall, while Garcia was short. Then, suddenly, another thought

occurred to him which, as the sailors say, brought him up all standing. Could that mysterious individual have been D'Alvaro himself? He was tall, and, moreover, he had a beard. He inquired from Miss de Montalva whether the latter had been at home between eleven and twelve on the night of their arrival at the Castle.

'I am afraid I cannot tell you,' she answered. 'I seldom see him after dark. He spends his evenings in the study, while I retire to my own chamber. But you surely do not associate him with the disappearance of your friend?'

'At the present moment I am prepared to associate him with anything diabolical,' was Jack's reply. 'If a man can treat you as he has done and is doing, he is capable of any villainy. But I must not keep you here any longer. They may be wondering at your absence. Now that you know of this spot, it will be possible for us to meet. I will be here at the same hour to-morrow, and I shall hope to be able to tell you then what I think is best to be done.'

'I thank you from the bottom of my heart,' she answered, looking up into his face with her dark, lustrous eyes. 'Fate has been kind to me in sending such a friend. If you can only

help me to find and save my brother, I shall bless you to my dying day.'

'If there is any way in which we can solve the problem, I will not rest until I have found it,' he answered.

Jack would have liked to say more, but he felt that this was not the time for that. Instead, he conducted her up the stairs and opened the panel by which they had entered. Before leaving the summer-house he took a good view of the neighbourhood, and convinced himself that there was no one in sight.

'Be sure when you come here to-morrow that you are not followed,' he said. 'We never know what eyes may be spying upon us. Now I will bid you good-bye.'

He held out his hand and she took it, gave him one more grateful glance, and sped away down the path.

When Jack had given her time to reach the bottom of the hill, he in his turn left the temple and made his way back to the stream—this time by a different route. Once more he reached the bridge and squeezed himself through between the masonry and the iron grille.

It was almost dusk when he reached home. During the walk he had endeavoured to

discover a way by which he could help Inez to find her brother without imperilling her own safety. It was nearly three weeks since she had seen him, and Jack knew that it was possible for a vast amount of harm to be done in that time. That the youth was an active Revolutionist he had no doubt in his own mind. But there are many such in Europe, and to attempt to find one particular person, who would have the best of reasons for remaining hidden, would be almost as difficult as to discover the proverbial needle in the bundle of straw. He reproached himself now for not having asked Inez whether she possessed a photograph of him, and made a mental resolution to put this question to her when he should see her on the morrow.

By reason of his promise he was compelled to keep the story he had been told that afternoon a secret from his sister. He, however, gave her a description of his meeting with the girl, and revealed to her the fact that she was, to all intents and purposes, a prisoner.

'Can he be keeping her shut up like that because there is some other suitor in the case of whom he does not approve, do you think?' asked Dot, when she heard this.

'I sincerely trust not,' her brother replied,

'for I love her desperately, and fully intend to win her for my wife.'

Dot heaved a heavy sigh as she thought of the sad fate that had attended her own love affair.

Jack was unusually silent that evening. He had so much to think of, such a difficult problem to solve, that a stranger would have taken him to be the gravest, instead of the most light-hearted, of mortals. It was not until a late hour that he retired, and even when he did, some time elapsed before he could get to sleep. Then all sorts of evil dreams began to assail him, in each of which Inez figured in more or less alarming positions. First D'Alvaro was pursuing her with the obvious intention of killing her; next Pedro Garcia was setting fire to the Castle with the same intention; last, and most terrible of all, he saw her drowning in the lake while he himself could not move hand or foot to save her.

Next morning he felt as though he had not slept a wink, and for once his usually hearty appetite failed him completely.

Until midday he remained in his study, smoking pipe after pipe, and going over and over the story he had heard in the hope of

finding a ray of light that might suggest a line of action. Not a beam, however, could he discover. One fact was gradually forcing itself upon his notice. Ormby without a doubt was playing a part in the business. But what was that part? If he had been murdered, what was the motive? If he had not, where was he, and why could not the police find him?

'Confound it!' the troubled young man exclaimed at last. 'I no sooner begin to think that I see my way when something else crops up and spoils it for me.'

Then once more he set to work, this time to put on paper the various heads of the case. This occupied him for upwards of an hour, but in the end he was no nearer an understanding of the matter than he had been before.

'D'Alvaro can tell her what he pleases to the contrary,' he soliloquised, 'but he is, of course, a member of the Society, whatever it may be, and is probably its head. He is pulling the strings, the unfortunate boy is doubtless the scapegoat, and they are holding the threat of injuring his sister over his head to induce him to do whatever work has been assigned to him. It seems to me that I have

let the dear old home to a gang of rascals such as one seldom meets. The worst of the whole business is that my hands are tied by my promise to her. I dare not say anything to the police. There's no knowing what would happen to her if I did. No, I must think of another way of working it. I'd help her to fly from the place if she would do so, but she would not consent to such a proposal. Then, again, if I find the brother, what action will he take? He might tell me to mind my own business, and then go on his own way again. The answer to my cable to St. Vincent may possibly help us a little, but it will not do to pin too much faith upon that.'

He lit another pipe and went out to the stable to endeavour to distract his thoughts for a time by looking over his horses. He was not very successful.

That afternoon he left home somewhat earlier than on the previous occasion, and made his way by a roundabout route to the bridge. He was unable to enter the park for upwards of a quarter of an hour owing to the presence of two old women on the bridge. They were gossiping and resting their baskets on the stone coping. Jack felt as if he could have shaken them, but there was nothing for

it but to stroll slowly on down the road until they had finished their conversation. When they had proceeded on their respective ways he returned, and, having made sure that he was unobserved, made his way under the bridge and unfastened the grille. A few minutes later he had climbed the hill and was standing in the temple.

So far there was no sign of the girl he loved. Pressing the panel, he entered, carefully closing it after him. When he reached the cave he looked about him, but she was not there. He grew nervous at the thought that possibly she might not be able to come, and felt angry with himself for not having asked her, in that case, to keep the appointment on the following afternoon. A quarter of an hour went by, and still she did not come.

Knowing how anxious she would be to see him, and to hear what he had to tell her, he had just convinced himself that something had occurred to prevent her coming when his quick ears caught the click of the spring in the panel, and a moment later the sound of a light footstep on the stone stair reached him.

'Thank goodness she is coming,' said Jack fervently. 'I don't believe I could have waited another twenty-four hours.'

Then Miss de Montalva appeared, and with a little exclamation of pleasure hastened across the sandy floor to greet him.

'I could not come before,' she said, 'for I was afraid they were watching me. My prolonged absence yesterday seems to have roused Monsieur d'Alvaro's suspicions. He cross-questioned me closely as to where I had been. He knows that I cannot get out of the park, and that I would not if I could. He is, nevertheless, very suspicious. He told me almost savagely that if I spoke to any one here, or endeavoured to make any acquaintances, he would confine me to the house altogether.'

'The brute!' said Jack, who at that moment felt a strong desire to chastise Monsieur d'Alvaro. 'You do not think they saw you coming here?'

'I do not think so,' she replied. 'But I should not care to be too sure. The keepers are continually on the watch, and they hide so cleverly that you cannot tell what they do or do not see. But tell me, I beg you, whether you think anything can be done to find and save my poor brother?'

'I have been over and over the matter,' said Jack, most truthfully; 'and I do not

know what to say. If your brother can be found without in any way risking your safety, I will do my utmost to find him. But time is precious, and I do not know where to begin my search. There are so many big cities in Europe, and it is probable that if he is engaged in any revolutionary business, he will be doing so under an assumed name. Do you chance to have a photograph of him?'

She shook her head.

'I am sorry to say that I have not,' she answered. 'He would never allow himself to be taken. I could draw you his portrait, however. I am supposed to have some skill in hitting a likeness, and, as you may suppose, his features are ever before me. I will commence immediately I get back, and will hand it to you when next we meet.'

'I could have it photographed,' Jack remarked, 'and copies could be sent in my name to the police of all the principal cities asking them to institute a search for him, for by so doing we may become cognisant of his whereabouts. After which I could either communicate with him personally, or transmit him a letter from you.'

'But will it not do him harm if you communicate with the police? They would natu-

rally be the last people he would like to be associated with.'

'They cannot do him any harm,' said Jack, in reply, 'if they have no charge to bring against him. I can say that I am making inquiries on behalf of a relative; but before we do that I have another plan to propose. Whether it could be successful or not is, of course, open to doubt. It seems to me, however, to be worthy of consideration.'

'May I ask what it is?'

'Well, I have been thinking that it is probable if I could overhaul D'Alvaro's study I should find some information there that would be of immense service to us.'

'But how could you do it? The room is always locked when he is not in it, and you could not do anything while he is there.'

'No. It must be done when he is not there,' Jack answered.

'But in what way? The house is so carefully guarded, and the study more closely than any other part of it.'

'I can quite believe that. But if it can be managed it shall be done. For the first time in my life, Miss de Montalva, it is my intention to turn my hand to burglaring. What sort of a craftsman I shall prove remains to

be seen. It will be a perilous enterprise, for it is necessary, for your sake, that D'Alvaro should not discover me. But so much is to be gained that, large though the risk is, I feel that I must run it. It is just possible we may discover in his study the key to the whole mystery.'

'And when will you make the attempt?'

'To-night, if possible. At what time does D'Alvaro retire to rest?'

'Seldom before midnight,' she answered. 'He and Garcia sit in the study talking as if they were never going to stop. Then I hear them come upstairs and go to their respective rooms.'

'In which wing do they sleep?'

'In the same wing as myself, that is to say, that which overlooks the rose-garden.'

'I understand,' said Jack. 'The east. And his study is in the west. That is very fortunate. It seems strange that an old boyish escapade should stand me in such good stead now. When I was a youngster, I ought to be ashamed to say, I used to go out at night when my father and every one else were in bed, and go with the head-keeper on his rounds, more for the romance of the thing than for any other reason. I used to make

my escape by a way of my own that I discovered by accident. I fancy no one knows of it but myself, and when the other day I was having sundry things attended to, prior to your arrival, I discovered that it was still in working order. I intend to utilise my knowledge to-night.'

'I shall live in an agony until I know that you have not been discovered, and then in another until I hear what the result of your visit has been. How soon, and how, will you be able to tell me?'

'You shall know immediately I am able to tell you,' he replied. 'I am afraid it will not be safe for you to come here to-morrow. Before I leave the house, however, I will write you a note, which you must destroy the moment you have read it, and will place it in a hole in the sun-dial on the south terrace. Be cautious that no one sees you take it.'

'I will be more than careful,' she answered. 'But I tremble at the risk you are going to run.'

'It is for your sake,' Jack murmured. 'For you I would do more than that.'

She blushed a rosy red and looked away from him. He was tempted to pursue his

advantage, but he did not do so. There would be time for that later on if all went well.

'Now,' said Jack, 'I think you had better be going. I do not want you to be treated as you were last night.'

They walked towards the stairs and ascended by them to the temple above. Jack had his hand upon the spring, and was in the act of pressing it when, to his horror, he heard the sound of voices on the other side.

CHAPTER X

It can be easily imagined with what horror and astonishment Trowbridge heard the sound of voices on the other side of the panel in the temple. Inez's hand upon his arm told him that she had also become aware of their proximity. What were they to do? Unhappily there was no choice before them. They must wait until the men had gone away, and then steal out in the hope of reaching their respective destinations without the others becoming aware that they had been there. One of the men, for Jack recognised him by his voice, was the German gamekeeper, who had accosted him on the day that he had first spoken to Inez. Who the other was it was impossible to tell. They spoke German, and everything they said was plainly audible to the pair on the other side of the wall.

'I tell you I saw her come up this way,' growled the gamekeeper. 'I missed her at the turn of the path, but that she was coming up to this place I am certain.'

'Then where is she gone?' his companion inquired. 'There is nowhere for her to hide in here. If you are so sure you saw her come up, produce her.'

'Produce her yourself,' retorted the other angrily. '*You* were told to keep your eye on her, not me. If you had not stayed so long talking to Otto, this would not have happened. The chief told you particularly to watch her movements and to report to him where she hides herself every afternoon. There will be some trouble when you tell him that you let her give you the slip.'

'Look here,' replied his companion angrily, 'I am not going to allow you to talk to me like this. I am as much a member of The League of Twelve as you are, and I'll thank you to be civil to me. If things had been done as I wanted them to be, the whole affair would have been finished by now, and we should have been out of England. As it is, there is still a week to run, with the chance of that young fool bungling it or being caught before the work is done.'

Jack felt the hand upon his arm tighten its grip. His knowledge of the language the men were speaking was scarcely equal to the task of following them, but he had no difficulty in

gathering that the 'young fool' in question was Inez's brother.

If the fact that the men following them to the temple had caused them great uneasiness, it had nevertheless relieved them somewhat. They knew now that they had a week in which to work.

'Come along; what's the good of waiting here?' said the gamekeeper. 'We must look for her elsewhere. She may be back at the house again by this time.'

'Any one would think that she had a lover with her, and that she wanted to keep out of the way,' remarked the other; and then, grumbling as before, the precious couple took themselves off, and their voices died away in the distance.

'Thank goodness they have gone,' whispered Jack. 'Now we must be more than careful. It was fortunate that we did not come up a minute before, or we should have been face to face with them.'

'Fortunate indeed,' Inez replied, 'for then they would have seen you. I don't know what would have happened then. I tremble even at the thought of it. But did you hear them say that my brother still had a week in which *to do his work?'*

'Yes, I heard it,' Jack answered. 'Please Heaven, in that time we shall have done something. Now, let me go out and reconnoitre. I want to make quite sure that they have really left this vicinity.'

He pressed the spring, and, when the panel was open, passed out into the temple. From what he could see through the pillars, without exposing himself, he felt that the two men really had departed. He therefore returned to Inez.

'I think it is safe for you to leave now,' he said. 'If I were you, however, I should make my way back by the path that leads to the lake. As they came in that direction and will now be looking for you further on, they will be scarcely likely to see you then.'

'I will do so. If to-night you discover anything of importance, you will place the message in the hole of the sun-dial?'

'I will not fail,' he answered.

She gave him her hand for a moment, and then walked quickly away in the direction Jack had indicated. He, on his side, remained a short time longer in the temple, then he took his departure. Stepping cautiously, and keeping a wary eye open for any sign of the enemy, he at length reached the stream and hastened

along it to the bridge. It was not until he stood on the bridge itself that he breathed freely.

'Had they caught me with Inez there would have been no end of trouble,' he said to himself, as he walked rapidly in the direction of the stile that led to the meadow path. 'To-night I shall have to be even more careful. Thank goodness there is no moon.' Then with a laugh he continued: 'It is not every man who commits a burglary in his own house, and in the interests of a pretty girl to whom he had spoken but three times. I wonder what the neighbourhood would say if it knew about it?'

Probably it was the thought of the coming adventure that was responsible for it, but that evening Jack was decidedly excited. Dot, who had been informed of the visit to the grotto, noticed it, and ascribed his agitation to this cause. She herself had been much upset that afternoon by an article in one of the daily papers which commented upon her lover's absence, and which threw out certain insinuations accounting for his mysterious disappearance. Knowing that this would upset her brother, she said nothing to him upon the subject, but, like the plucky girl she was, bore

her trouble in silence. At ten o'clock she retired, while Jack made his way to the study and lit a pipe, and sat down to think over what he was about to do. At half-past eleven he went to his bedroom and changed his evening attire for a dark shooting-suit. In place of his boots he put on a pair of tennis-shoes. A dark cap completed his costume. That work completed he descended to his study once more, where he stood for a few moments before a locked cabinet at the further end of the room.

'Shall I or shall I not?' was the question he was putting to himself. Then he added: 'Well, perhaps after all it would be safer.'

Taking a key from his pocket he opened the door. Inside were his cherished guns, and on a shelf a formidable-looking Colt's revolver. This he loaded, and, when he had done so, dropped it into his pocket.

'I pray I may not have to use it,' he said, 'but seeing the class of gentlemen I may have to meet, it's just as well to be prepared for any contingency.'

In case anything should happen to him he took the precaution of writing a note to his sister, in which he informed her that he was going up to the Castle, and that if he did not return by breakfast-time, she would know

where to find him. Then he left the house quietly and set off on his perilous undertaking.

It was a bright, starlight night, with a little breeze blowing, light enough for him to be able to see his way, but dark enough to give him some protection. He had carefully considered his route before setting out, and was of the opinion that it would be best and safest for him to make his way up to the house by the path he had followed on the day that he had first spoken to Inez. He would then be less likely to meet the keepers, while it would also enable him to proceed direct to the side of the house he was so anxious to reach.

It was nearly one o'clock by the time he reached the tree by which he had scaled the fence on the previous occasion. Taking a firm grasp of the bough he pulled himself up as before and dropped as lightly as a cat upon the soft ground on the other side. He stood there for a few moments listening, but the hoot of an owl was the only sound he could hear. Picking his way carefully he set off in the direction of the house. No American Scout or Red Skin could have been more careful than he was, nor could they have shown better woodcraft. Keeping in the deepest shadow, hastening forward when the

land was favourable, and proceeding more slowly where there was any chance of his making a noise, he advanced until he stood at the foot of the steps of the terrace, on which stood the sun-dial that he hoped would play such an important part in the events of the evening. He felt his heart beating quicker as he crossed the smooth-shaven lawn, and approached his old home. Never when a boy had he dreamt of such an adventure as that upon which he was now engaged.

Keeping well in the deeper shadow of the house, he made his way along until he reached a spot about half-way down the wing.

'Let's hope I am not too broad now to crawl through that window,' he said, as he stooped over an iron grating a few feet from the wall.

A vigorous pull lifted the grating from its place, and he placed it carefully and noiselessly against the wall. At his feet yawned a black well some five feet deep. He dropped into this, and, as he knew he would do, found himself standing before a small window. The latter was bolted, but he was prepared for that. Taking his knife from his pocket, he thrust it between the sashes. The bolt shot back with a clatter that almost brought his

heart to his mouth. He waited for a few moments to see if the noise had attracted attention, but it did not appear to have done so. Then, as softly as he knew how, he raised the lower part of the window. When it would go no further, he went down on his hands and knees and crept in, his shoulders touching on either side. Once in the house, he felt for the left-hand wall, and by this felt his way until his right hand came into contact with the door. The room was unused and unfurnished, and had once been kept as a bedroom for a valet or footman. It opened into the stone-flagged corridor that terminated at the servants' hall, and commenced at the foot of the back staircase. On the flags his india-rubber soles made but little noise, and as he was familiar with every inch of his surroundings, he went forward as quickly as circumstances would permit. Reaching the stairs, he ascended them, and softly pushed open the swing-door at the top. That door had a diabolical habit of creaking, as he was well aware, and he dreaded lest the sound should echo through the silent house. Once more luck favoured him, for no one appeared to hear it. Another short passage brought him into the main hall. He smiled as he thought of his ancestors, who were

looking down at him from their canvases upon the wall. What did they think of this strange business?

'I hope they would have done the same had they been in my place,' he thought, as he tiptoed along towards the room which was used by D'Alvaro as a study. He had brought a key with him which he knew would fit the lock, and he had oiled it carefully so that it should not make any noise.

Reaching the door he first looked carefully underneath in order to make sure that there was no light within. He had no desire to open it, and then finding himself standing face to face with D'Alvaro. There was no light, however, so he proceeded with his work with as much despatch as possible. The key moved easily in the lock and, having turned the handle, he opened the door and stepped into the room. So far all had gone well, but as yet he was but at the commencement of his enterprise. What if the other key he had brought with him did not fit the lock in the desk? What then? A very few moments would settle it once and for all.

Having closed the door softly behind him and lighted a candle, he looked about him. The desk which he remembered so well stood

at the further end of the room, and was a solid mahogany affair, worthy of the room of which it formed part of the furniture. In the centre of the apartment was a table now littered with papers and books. He glanced casually at them, and noticed that they were almost exclusively foreign. Indeed, there was only one English paper he could see amongst them. A small bronze tray, almost filled with cigar ash, and a curiously-shaped paper-knife added to the litter of the table. Without further waste of time, he crossed to the desk and sat down before it. Taking from his waistcoat pocket the duplicate key that belonged to the desk, and which he had forgotten to hand over when D'Alvaro had taken the place, he inserted it into the lock of one of the drawers. Much to his satisfaction, the lock had not been changed; a turn of the wrist, and the drawer was opened. It contained a number of neatly tied-up packages, labelled in French. He examined them carefully; some were bills, and these he placed in the drawer, feeling that they had no interest for him, others consisted of cuttings from newspapers, with the date written in red ink upon the top; these he placed on one side to be looked at later; others were letters, evidently written by a female and in Italian. As he

had no knowledge of that language, however, these were useless to him. There were others in Spanish which were equally unintelligible. A German packet he thought he might be able to manage, though he was by no means sure. Next he came upon an account-book which was filled with mysterious figures, which told him nothing. This he placed among those papers he could not understand, and once more proceeded with his investigations. When he had exhausted this drawer, he turned his attention to another. In that he discovered what he knew to be his most precious find. One glance at it showed him that it was nothing more or less than a diary, and, presumably, since he found it where he did, it belonged to D'Alvaro.

He opened it with eager interest and scanned the pages. Inez had told him the date on which they had left Rome, and he hastened to turn up the entry for that day. Yes, here it was:

'Bade farewell to Rome. I. M. accompanied me—also P. G.' The I. M. referred to could only be Inez Montalva, while the P. G. could only be Pedro Garcia. The next entry was Milan.

'All well so far. Had interview with X.

M. M. reported to have crossed Border safely. Left for Paris.'

The next day showed a brief entry to the effect that they had only remained three days in the French capital, that the terms had been settled for the English house, and I. M. was proving obstinate.

Under the last was this significant observation:

'I have given her plainly to understand what her position is, and what the result will be if she attempts to play us false.'

Later there was the description of their arrival at the Castle, and on the same day a paragraph that Jack read more than once, but found some difficulty in understanding. It was as follows:

'Received great shock, but have placed matters on an eminently satisfactory footing. No evil will result—but prompt action was necessary.'

Did this refer to Jim Ormby? If it did, what was the prompt action that was so necessary? Jack felt that he would have given something to have been able to read the riddle. Three days later he found a statement which he regarded with peculiar interest.

'J. T. gone to Liverpool. Have instructed P. G.'

Though he searched diligently for it, he could not find any mention of the anonymous letter. If D'Alvaro had written it he had made no mention of it in his diary. He turned back a few pages to see what had happened prior to their leaving Rome, and on one day found that M. M., the luckless Manuel, had received his notice, and was to be ready to start in two days' time. There was another statement to the effect that it was only fair that M. should have been chosen, seeing that he was a son of the soil.

'Then he's in Spain, that's evident,' said Jack to himself. 'That, at least, is one point gained. Now, if I can only find out in what town he is, I shall feel that I am getting nearer the heart of the matter.'

But how he was to do that was somewhat more difficult to decide. He searched the book in vain for any reference that might give him the hint he wanted. There were initials in plenty, and once or twice those of the young man; none of them, however, had any connection with Spain. Then he remembered what one of the men had said in the temple that afternoon, concerning the week that must

elapse before a certain work could be carried out. He immediately turned the pages until he reached that of the date in question. In the top left-hand corner a cross had been drawn in red ink, and underneath it the initials M. M. in brackets. While he was glad to have his suspicions confirmed, this told him little. He wanted the name of the town, for until he got that he knew he was powerless to act.

When he had convinced himself that nothing more was to be learnt from the diary, he turned his attention to the letters, beginning with those in German. These he found difficult to read, and apparently of no great significance when he had done so. Those in French he could manage better, and it was in one of these that he made his next important discovery. The writer, who was plainly a person of some culture, inquired after the health of the young Spaniard who had such a beautiful sister, and went on to ask when a certain event was to take place. 'If my opinion were asked,' he went on, 'not until late in the month, and only at Madrid, where the effect would be better and the opportunity more certain.' The remainder of the letter had no bearing upon the case. He picked up the next and read that.

It did not, however, reward him, nor were any of the others kinder to him.

Taking up a sheet of paper, he made notes upon it concerning his various discoveries and placed it in his pocket. All things considered, he had been fairly successful. It is true he did not know the young man's actual address, but he knew that he was in Madrid, and he had a week before him in which to find out the rest. He thereupon took another sheet of paper and penned a short note to Inez, telling her of his discoveries, and asking her to furnish him with the portrait she had promised him, and also as strong an appeal to the youth to give up the business upon which he was engaged as she knew how to write. In order that she might have an opportunity of doing so without incurring suspicion, he would send a youth who might be trusted up to the Castle punctually at eleven o'clock, when she must make it her business to discover a means of intercepting him and of handing him the portrait. For the present, he did not think it would be prudent for them to attempt to meet, but he would write to her and find a means of placing his letters inside the panel at the temple.

This important business being finished, he placed the letter in his pocket and rose to

depart. His glance at the clock upon the chimney-piece showed him that he had been more than an hour in the house.

Having made sure that he had left nothing behind him to reveal the fact that he had been there, he quietly opened the door, and, when he was outside, closed and locked it behind him. Now, with a little bit of luck, he ought to be able to get out of the house unobserved. Once more he tiptoed down the hall, and, having opened the creaking swing-door, descended to the basement. He reached the empty room in safety, and once more clambered through the window. To replace the grating was the work of a moment, and that done he commenced his homeward journey, pausing at the sun-dial to deposit the note he had written to Inez. His return to the spot where he had entered the park was accomplished without accident, and, when the clock in his study struck three, he was standing before it congratulating himself on the success which had attended his first effort in burglary.

CHAPTER XI

IMMEDIATELY after breakfast next morning, Jack called up the boy he intended to send to the Castle in order to bring back the portrait Inez had promised him. He knew that the messenger could be trusted, but he thought that there could be no harm in making him understand the supreme importance of his visit, and the desirability of his saying nothing about it, either to his fellow-servants or to any one else.

'You needn't be afraid, sir,' said the boy, when he had heard Jack out. 'I won't breathe a word to a living soul.'

'That 's right,' Jack returned, and then gave him the note. It was addressed to D'Alvaro, and merely informed him that if, as the shooting season was approaching, he should not find the Castle preserves large enough for his requirements, he knew of another property in the immediate neighbourhood which could be obtained at a moderate rental. This was

perfectly true, for only the day before he had received a letter offering him the shooting.

Having despatched the boy on his errand, he sat down to run over his notes. He was in the middle of this work when a servant entered with a telegram upon a salver. It was from the Mitcham Shipping Company and ran as follows:

'Regret to say captain reports passenger has no scar upon forehead. Fear must be another person.'

'Just what I expected,' said Jack to himself, with a heavy sigh. 'My belief is that we were only enticed off on this wrong scent in order that other people might gain time. What on earth can have become of Jim? If I were to go to D'Alvaro and ask him what he knows about it, he would, of course, protest his ignorance of the matter. For obvious reasons I cannot go to the police and tell them what I have discovered in the man's diary, and yet, at the same time, I cannot allow matters to drift along in this fashion.'

He then went in search of his sister, and told her of the news he had received. She received it quite quietly. From the very first she had made up her mind that her lover was not the man who had left England in the *Marwhal*.

'He is gone,' she said, 'and I shall never see him again. Now, Jack, don't think me silly for what I am going to say to you, but often at night I wake up almost certain that I have heard his voice telling me that he is alive, that he loves me, and that it will not be long before we are together again.'

'Let's pray that it may be so,' said her brother cheerfully. 'I cannot help thinking that if he were not alive we should have known something definite by this time. At any rate, I shall show this telegram to the police. It may be the means of stirring them up to fresh activity.'

He accordingly wrote a note to the Superintendent of the Police at Great Brackford, explaining matters, and enclosing the telegram he had received. This note he sent off with a groom, bidding the man wait for an answer. After that he sat down to await, with what patience he could command, the return of the boy from the Castle. He was helped in this arduous task by the arrival of the morning paper, in the columns of which he endeavoured to interest himself. He turned page after page, but it was not until a telegram from Spain caught his eye that he was able to rivet his attention.

'Good Heavens!' he exclaimed aloud. 'This looks as if it might be the very thing.'

'The acceptance by the famous Don Alfonso y Ribiera of the position of Minister of War has caused profound sensation here. For some years he has been living in exile. His return to Madrid on the twenty-eighth is almost certain to become the subject of a demonstration. The police are taking measures accordingly.'

'We've got to the root of the matter now,' said Jack, puffing solemnly at his pipe. 'Don Alfonso is the man young Montalva is after, and I must make it my business to stop him. But how on earth am I to get there? I know nothing about Spain, and yet to Spain I must go, and as quickly as possible. I wish that boy would hurry up!'

Ten minutes later the youth in question put in an appearance. He had evidently made great speed, for his face was red and his breath came in gasps.

'Well,' said Jack, 'did you see the lady, and did you get the letter?'

'Yes, sir,' panted the boy. 'She dropped it in the drive, and I picked it up. Here it is.'

Taking the letter from his pocket he placed it on the writing-table. Instead of leaving,

however, he fumbled with his cap and shifted uneasily upon his feet. Presently he began:

'You'll excuse me, sir, but I've got something to say to you. I should have said it before, but that I was afraid you would laugh at me for it.'

'What is it?' Jack inquired. He could see that the boy was in deadly earnest about something. As a rule he was a stolid individual and not easily put out.

'Well, sir, it's this way,' the youth continued, 'we've all heard about Mr. Ormby being killed.'

In an instant Jack's interest was aroused. Was it possible that the boy might have chanced upon a new discovery?

'What have you heard?'

'Well, sir, it's like this. I took your letter up to the side-door and waited to see if there was an answer. There was a peacock on the lawn and I stepped a bit out of the path to have a look at him. He flew up to the top of the wall of that small garden. You know where I mean, sir?'

'Yes,' Jack replied. 'You mean what is called the Fountain Court? Go on.'

'Well, sir, just then the butler came back and told me that there was no answer, and

I went along the path underneath the wall where the bird was. Then, sir, you may believe it or not, but it's the truth, I heard somebody on the other side say what sounded like "Heigho! this is weary work!"' Here the boy's excitement got the better of him, and he continued: 'I believe it was Mr. Ormby's voice. I've heard him talk many a time, and I'm as sure of it as if I had seen him.'

'This is a most extraordinary story, my lad,' said Jack, when the boy had finished, 'a most extraordinary story indeed, and one that I should feel far from inclined to laugh at. Now, look here, John, whatever happens you must not breathe a word of this to any one. You can see for yourself how important it is. If Mr. Ormby is at the Castle, as you say, it is quite certain that he is not there of his own free will, and the police will have to be called in. That will take time. If any one gets to know of what you have told me, it will certainly prevent us doing what we want to do.'

'I won't say a word to anybody on no account, sir,' replied the boy.

'If anything comes of your discovery your fortune's made,' said Jack. 'Now you can go.'

When the lad had left the room Jack began to pace his room in anxious thought.

'This puts the cap on everything,' he said, puffing at his pipe more vigorously than ever. 'I have had a suspicion all along at the back of my mind that D'Alvaro might have hidden Ormby away somewhere, but I never thought he would have the impudence to abduct him and lock him up in the Castle. But it's the object that beats me. What earthly reason could he have for such behaviour? Jim isn't a conspirator, and he is not a busybody. Why, then, should he want to keep him out of the way? If we were living in Turkey it might be for the sake of the ransom; but then Jim isn't a rich man, and there are plenty of others about here that are more worth the trouble. However, that's neither here nor there. What I've got to do is to find out whether he is really there, and, if so, what course I am to adopt to get him out.'

He had so far been taken up by the boy's intelligence that he had forgotten to examine the letter from Inez. He took it up and opened it. He had hoped there was a note inside, and he was not disappointed. With it was a card, upon which was sketched with considerable skill a portrait of the young man.

There was also the letter he had asked her to write to her brother. One had only to glance at it to feel sure that it was an excellent likeness, and Jack felt that, were he to meet young Montalva, he would recognise him at once. It was a handsome face, but a by no means resolute one. He could imagine that its possessor would be of a fiery nature, quick to work himself into a passion, and equally quick to forgive.

When he had made himself thoroughly familiar with it, he placed it in his pocket-book and opened the letter. This was what he read:

'Dear Friend,—I rejoice that you have succeeded, and I pray that you may be still more fortunate. I enclose you the letter you asked me to write to Manuel. I do not know how I shall ever repay you for what you have done for me.—Your grateful friend,

'Inez de Montalva.'

As a man of the world, I must confess that I do not see anything very remarkable in this note. Yet Jack has it now, and I am given to understand values it among his most principal possessions. I found it only the other day in his family Bible, and, on asking what he would take for it, was informed that

there was not money enough in England to purchase it.

Half an hour later he ordered his dogcart in order to drive into Great Brackford. He wanted to call at the railway station to discover how, and in what time, it would be possible for him to reach Madrid. Then, if nothing unforeseen happened to prevent him, he would commence his journey in the mail-train that night.

It was the first time in the stationmaster's life that he had been asked such a staggering question, and a vast amount of papers had to be overhauled before the matter could be satisfactorily settled. He was an inquisitive man, and would have dearly liked to have found out what business it was that was taking the young squire to the capital of Spain. His curiosity, however, was not satisfied.

From the information he received, Jack learnt that Madrid was forty-five hours' journey from London, *via* Boulogne, and forty-six *via* Calais; while by taking the train de Luxe Sud Express, he could do the journey in forty and a half hours.

'That's the train for me,' he said, 'and I am more than obliged to you. If I leave by the

midnight mail to-night I should be able to do it nicely.'

He thanked the stationmaster and then drove on to the bank, where he cashed a cheque for a hundred pounds. Then he turned his horse's head homewards.

'Poor old Jim!' he thought, as he bowled along. 'It may seem awfully unfriendly, but I'm afraid you'll have to remain where you are until I get back from the South. To attempt to liberate you now would have the effect of spoiling everything.' Then another idea occurred to him. 'I wonder if it would be possible,' he continued, 'to get a message conveyed to him through Inez? If so, she might let him know that I am acquainted with his whereabouts, and bid him keep up a good heart until we can liberate him.'

So far he had not told Dot of the discovery he had made. He was not certain even now that it would be wise to do so until he was quite convinced that there was no mistake. It was a difficult matter to decide, but at length he came to the conclusion that it would be better for all parties concerned if he were to keep his information until he returned from Madrid. It might appear cruel, but after all it was only to be kind. He had, however,

to break the news to her concerning his journey, and this he did immediately he reached home. She heard him out in amazement.

'Do you mean to tell me that you are going to Madrid to-night?' she asked. 'And is it impossible for you to tell me your business? Jack, you frighten me!'

'You need not be afraid. There is nothing to fear. Mr. Montalva is in serious trouble, and all I can tell you is that I am going to Madrid to endeavour to put matters right for his sister. She has no one else she can trust.'

Dot was by no means reassured.

'I have never heard of such a thing,' she said pettishly, for she was inclined to be jealous of the influence Inez had so suddenly obtained over her brother. And now that she was sending him away from home on most mysterious business, she was even more troubled than before.

'Of course, you know your own business best,' she said; 'but, Jack, do be careful. Remember how you were decoyed away to Liverpool on a fruitless errand. May not the same thing be happening now?'

'It may be that my errand is fruitless,' her brother replied. 'I am quite sure, however, that I am not being decoyed away. Inez

would not do such a thing. That was not a kind speech to adopt, Dot.'

He could bear even the least insinuation to be made against the woman he was serving so faithfully.

'I did not mean it in that light,' the girl replied. 'I have only seen Inez once, and I am quite prepared to trust her; but I do not trust Monsieur d'Alvaro, and I am quite sure you do not. I do not know why I should do so, but I cannot help connecting him in some way with Jim's disappearance!'

Jack gave a start. Was it possible that the boy had told Dot what he had heard?

'What makes you say that?' he asked, with surprise.

'I do not know,' she answered, thus setting his doubts at rest. 'I have no reason for doing so; all the same I cannot rid myself of my suspicions. The man is a bad man, of that I am convinced; and, if his face is any criterion to go by, I believe he would do anything to gain his own ends. That is why I am so frightened about this journey of yours.'

'And I tell you again that you need not be. You have no cause.'

'And how long will you be away?'

'A week should see me back here again;

ten days at the latest. I shall cross by the first boat to-morrow and travel down by the Sud Express. I shall, therefore, be in Madrid on Sunday morning. You can picture me on Sunday morning as you are going to church.'

'I shall be lonely without you,' she answered sadly.

'You will appreciate me more on my return,' he replied cheerfully. 'And now I must go and see about my packing.'

His intention was to take only a kit bag with him, and when he had packed this he made his way to his study and sat down to write his letter to Inez. He told her of his intention to leave that night, and of the great deeds he hoped to accomplish. He said nothing, however, concerning his surmises about Alfonso y Ribiera. Then bidding her wait in patience, and hope for the best, he signed his name and placed the letter in its envelope.

'Now for one more visit to the grotto,' he muttered, as he rose from his chair. 'I trust it may be as successful as its predecessors.'

He thereupon left the house and set off for the bridge. Fate again favoured him, for when he reached it he found that he had the road to himself. He passed the grille safely

and made his way up the stream as he had done on previous occasions. So far as he could see no one was about and he was permitted to climb the hill and to enter the temple unmolested. He opened the panel and stepped inside, hoping against hope that he might find a letter lying upon the steps for him. He struck a match and looked about him, but much to his disappointment he could not discover one. He deposited his own on the floor below and was about to leave again when a sweet voice called him by name. His heart leaped at the sound, and scarcely able to believe his good fortune he hastened down the steps. Inez was standing waiting for him, a ray of the sunlight from the hole in the roof falling upon her and lighting up her beautiful face.

'I had no idea you would come,' said Jack.

'Monsieur d'Alvaro has gone into lunch and I managed to slip out,' she answered. 'But I must not remain long. Last night I was so frightened on your account. More than once I thought I heard a noise, and I feared lest you should be discovered. You tell me that you have important news and that my brother is in Madrid? What is to be done?'

'I leave for Madrid to-night,' Jack answered. 'There is no time to lose.'

She stared at him in as much amazement as his sister had done.

'You are going to Madrid?' she echoed. 'Oh, Mr. Trowbridge, do you mean that?'

'I do most certainly mean it,' Jack replied. 'I shall be in that city within forty-eight hours of leaving London. Then, if all goes well, I shall find your brother and plead with him.'

'Heaven grant that he may listen to you!' she said, raising her clasped hands as if in entreaty to Providence. 'I shall pray for you night and morning while you are gone. Surely Heaven should hear my prayers?'

'There is one question I must put to you before I leave you,' said Jack. 'With whom would your brother be likely to stay while in that city? Does he know any old friend of your father's there who would be of the same way of thinking in political matters and who would take him in?'

She thought for a few moments, pacing up and down the grotto as she did so.

'Yes, there is one man,' she answered at last. 'A doctor named Morento, who was a great friend of my father's, and who my brother would certainly visit, even if he did not actually reside in his house. But whether he would give you Manuel's address, or tell you any-

thing of him, is quite another matter. Remember, Mr. Trowbridge, what I have told you about them, and reflect what you are doing. If anything were to happen to you, your sister would never forgive me, and I should never forgive myself.'

'Nothing will happen to me,' he replied. 'While I am working for you fate will be on my side, and I am not afraid of any man.'

She shook her head sadly.

'You are too brave,' she said. 'And now I must go. I am hindering you, and you must have much to do before you start, and I am increasing your danger. You received the letter for Manuel and also the portrait I sent you of him?'

'I did,' Jack replied, 'and I feel that it must be a good likeness. I am quite sure if I see him I shall recognise him by it.'

Jack made a note of Dr. Morento's name and address, and when he had replaced his pocket-book an awkward pause ensued. He had one request to make, and he did not quite know how to put it to her. He therefore stood before her, as bashful as a schoolboy in his first love-affair.

'Miss de Montalva,' he said at last, 'before I go I've got a request I want to make to

you. I don't know whether you will deem me impertinent for asking it, but I trust you will not.'

'It would go hard if I were to deem you impertinent after all you have done for me,' she answered. 'Tell me what your request is and I will tell you whether I can grant it. It is impossible for me to do so before I know.'

There was a little twinkle of amusement in her eyes which gave him courage.

'I want you to give me some little talisman,' he said, 'to take with me to bring me luck in my mission. You do not know how I shall value it, even the least trifle.'

'You are worth more than a trifle,' she returned. 'If you think it will bring you luck I will willingly give you something.'

She took from the second finger of her left hand a quaint old signet ring that Jack had noticed on previous occasions.

'Take this,' she said. 'It has been in our family for many years, and I have worn it ever since I have worn jewellery of any kind.'

Jack took it and placed it upon his little finger. It would have fitted no other.

'When I return,' he said, 'it shall be restored to you. In the meantime I will wear it night and day.'

They passed up the stone stairs together, and when the panel had been removed made their way into the temple.

'I must make sure that the coast is clear,' Jack remarked. 'We mustn't be caught here on this our last day together.'

He stepped to the door of the temple and looked out. Then he turned and sprang back to Inez's side.

'The German keeper is coming up the hill,' he said. 'He must find you alone. Seat yourself here with your book. I will conceal myself until he has gone. Good-bye!'

'Good-bye, and may the saints be with you!'

Jack stepped inside and closed the panel after him. He was anxious to hear what the man would say. Two or three minutes elapsed before he made his appearance, and when he did he was out of breath.

'Ah, here you are, my lady,' he said. 'I have been hunting for you everywhere. Herr d'Alvaro desires to speak with you at once. He told me to fetch you.'

'If you had come up here first you would have found me,' Inez replied haughtily. 'You know that this is my favourite spot.'

'I know that it is a long climb,' retorted the man, in a surly tone.

'Well, we will not bandy words,' the girl answered. 'Take me to Herr d'Alvaro.'

They left the temple together, and after giving them a few minutes Jack followed their example. No accident marred his walk to the bridge. He replaced the friendly grille without being observed, and then set off upon his walk across the meadows.

At ten minutes to midnight that night Jack left Great Brackford in the mail-train on his way to London. The most important journey of his otherwise quiet life had commenced. What would the end be?

CHAPTER XII

Of one thing I am quite sure, and that is that Jack Trowbridge will remember the journey to Spain as long as he can recollect anything. He reached London at two o'clock in the morning, and left Charing Cross for Dover at nine o'clock. He had a smooth passage across the Channel, and a pleasant journey to Paris. It was not, however, until he found himself in the Sud Express, roaring away south, that he felt that he was making any real headway. As the train sped on its way he was able to devote plenty of time to thinking over what he should do when he reached the Spanish capital. It was then that he felt he would have given anything had he learnt the language of the country. As, however, he was not conversant with it, he knew that he would have to rely upon his wits to help him as far as possible. For obvious reasons he could not employ an interpreter, and yet how he was to make himself understood without one—for he

would have to ask many questions—he could not quite understand.

As the journey advanced, his impatience increased with it. When he turned into his bunk, it was not to sleep. The gentle rocking of the train did not soothe him; it made him only the more anxious to get on. And when at last they reached the border and were turned out to have their baggage inspected, and to take their places on another train, he could have poured an anathema on the whole system of railway travelling. Right glad was he to at last find himself in the ancient Spanish capital.

Leaving the station he made his way to an hotel, which had been recommended to him by a man in London, who was well acquainted with Madrid, and upon whom he had paid an unceremonious visit in the few hours he had had at his disposal before proceeding to Charing Cross. It was a comfortable, almost luxurious, abiding-place, and he felt that it would suit him very well for the short time he was to spend in the capital.

Immediately on arrival there he had a bath, a proceeding which seemed to cause the man who attended him a considerable amount of astonishment, and then ordered breakfast.

That meal over, he donned his hat and went out to inspect the city. He was anxious to get a general idea of his surroundings before proceeding to business, and he could not have chosen a better time than this warm Sunday morning. As he walked along the streets he watched the passers-by, but among all the daughters of Old Spain that he encountered, he could not find one so beautiful as the lonely girl he had left behind in England.

By the time he returned to the hotel he had taken in something of the city, and was eager to know more of it. His next move must be to discover the street in which Dr. Morento had his abode, and then to endeavour to find out whether the unfortunate young Montalva was residing with him.

When he had made the nearest approach to lunch the hotel was able to afford him, Jack lit a cigar, preparatory to setting out on his errand. Before doing so, however, he was anxious to make some inquiries as to the locality in which the street in question was situated. He tried one of his neighbours in English and French and German, but failed to elicit a response. He discovered later that the man was Italian and could speak Spanish fluently. He tried another, but this individual

only bowed profoundly, with his hand upon his stomach, and answered in the best Castilian. Eventually he left the hotel, determined to try his luck in the streets.

Leaving the thoroughfare in which his hotel was situated, he turned into the Puerta del Sol, at one time the Eastern Gate upon which the rising sun shone. This was the centre of the city, and Jack felt that it should be the starting-place for any inquiry he might care to make.

During the afternoon a famous bull-fight was to take place at the bull-ring which, as any one who has visited Madrid knows, is situated outside the city on the road leading to Genta del Espiritu Santo, and half of the population of the city seemed to be making its way thither. For a moment Jack felt inclined to follow their example, but when he remembered how precious his time was, he determined not to do so, but instead to devote his afternoon to the task of discovering the whereabouts of the Calle del Guadiana, in which Dr. Morento had his abode. Bowing politely, he stopped more than one pedestrian and inquired of him whether he was familiar with the place. To the answers they gave him, however, he could attach no importance,

since, without exception, they were given in Spanish. Fate, however, did not forsake him.

He had reached the corner of the Caille Montera, and was wondering as to what he should do next, when he saw coming towards him a stout, genial-looking gentleman, whom, by some strange reasoning, his instinct told him was an Englishman. He approached him, raising his hat as he did so.

'I hope you will excuse me for stopping you,' said Jack, 'but I feel sure that you are an Englishman.'

The stranger smiled pleasantly and nodded.

'I don't know why you should think so,' he answered. 'I don't mind confessing, however, that I am. I am a Londoner—a Cockney, if you like. You are a stranger in Madrid, I presume? Can I be of any service to you?'

'You can be of great service, if you will,' Jack replied. 'I have been questioning all sorts of people within the last hour in the hope of being able to discover where the Calle del Guadiana is situated. No one seems to know, however; or, if they do know, they have such a lot to say about it, that I find it hopeless to try and make head or tail of their directions.'

'The Calle del Guadiana,' said the other

reflectively. 'Let me see now. I am not quite sure that I know myself. However, I have a very good friend down here, if you will accompany me, who, I am quite sure, will be able to set us right.'

Jack apologised for troubling him, and then followed him to a tobacconist's in a neighbouring street. The proprietor was in the act of starting for the bull-fight, but he had still sufficient time left to give the information asked for. Jack's new acquaintance translated it, and then explained how it would be possible for him to reach the locality about which he was inquiring. In order that there should be no mistake, the proprietor wrote it down and assured him that if he were to show it to any cabman or tram conductor, it would enable him to reach his destination. Jack was profuse in his thanks, particularly to the Englishman, who was loth to let him depart. He handed him his card, from which it would appear that his name was Tollington, and that he was a merchant in the Carrera Fan Geronimo. He stated also that if he could be of any further assistance, he would be only too glad to do all that lay in his power.

'I shall hope to avail myself of your kindness,' Jack replied. 'I am here for a week,

and, as you have seen for yourself, I am ignorant of the Spanish language.'

Then Jack bade him farewell, and set out at a smart pace for the residence of the doctor.

Now the Calle del Guadiana, while being doubtless highly respectable, was in no sense imposing. The houses it contained were plainly those of middle-class people. Inez had informed him that Dr. Morento's was the fifth house on the right-hand side, but now he was confronted with the question as to which she considered the right-hand side. If it were the fifth house on the right-hand side coming from the city, then he was exactly opposite it, but if its location was to be judged when entering from the suburbs, then it was on the opposite side, and at the further end. While he was making up his mind as to what he should do, a jolly old priest emerged from one of the houses and came along the pavement towards him. He accosted him in French, and put the necessary questions to him. By good fortune, it happened that he was acquainted with the residence of the doctor. If monsieur would follow the street along, he would find it on the left-hand side and a few doors from the end. He would know it, because there was a lamp-post exactly opposite the door, and

also because the shutters were painted a dark red. Jack thanked him and passed on again.

Before he reached the house in question, he took the precaution of crossing the street, and when he found himself opposite it, he did not stand still and examine it, but passed on until he came to the end of the street. Loitering there, he was able to give it sufficient attention for his requirements. It was no more imposing than its neighbours, even though it held so great an interest for him. It was a square building of the typical Madrid order, and gave evidence of no particular wealth on the part of its owner. While he was watching it, an elderly, grey-haired man, who walked with a stick, and who might have been anything between sixty and seventy years of age, came out and hobbled away along the pavement in the direction whence Jack had come.

Jack immediately crossed the street and set off in pursuit. Before he came up to him, however, he had changed his mind, and from that moment he kept a respectable distance between himself and the man he was following. When he reached the corner of the next street he gave up the pursuit, and returned leisurely

to his hotel. An idea had suddenly occurred to him, which he thought might be worth putting into practice.

For the rest of the day he amused himself as best he could, wandering about the city, and keeping his eyes always open for a glimpse of the youth he was so anxious to find. It is needless to say that his task was unsuccessful.

When he retired to rest that night, he had to confess to himself that, while he had not altogether failed to discover any clue, he had made but small progress. From what he had heard, the city was already in a ferment concerning the arrival of Alfonso y Ribiera. The authorities were taking extraordinary precautions, yet no one seemed to know exactly what had happened. There was an uneasy feeling abroad that did not speak very highly of the General's popularity with the inhabitants of Madrid.

Next morning, when he left his hotel, Jack made his way to Mr. Tollington's office. Early as the hour was he found his friend of the previous day already seated at his writing-table. The latter rose to greet him, and seemed pleased to renew the acquaintance.

'In what way can I be of service to you?' Tollington inquired, when he had shaken hands.

'As I told you yesterday, I shall be most happy to help you in any way I can.'

'You are very good,' Jack replied; 'and I will only too gladly avail myself of the privilege you offer me. If you will permit me, I will tell you why I am here.'

'Pray do not trouble to do that,' the merchant replied politely. 'It is quite sufficient for me to know that you are an Englishman. Now tell me what I can do for you.'

'I want to be introduced to Doctor Morento of this city. I have come on behalf of a lady whose brother deserted her; and from information I have received, I have reason to believe that it is just possible he may be residing with the doctor. I am, however, anxious to convince myself on that point. How to do so I cannot tell, for the doctor has a strong influence over him, and it is more than likely, even if I find him, that the doctor's power would prevent me from getting him back to his sister. To succeed, therefore, it will be necessary for me to make my way into the doctor's house in a fictitious way. The only plan I can hit upon is that I should pretend to be ill, though I could not do that without an interpreter.'

'And you would like me to act in that

capacity?' said the merchant. 'Well, I see nothing to prevent me from doing so. When would you like to set out?'

'Immediately you can conveniently arrange to do so,' answered Jack, who was anxious to incur no further delay.

'Come along, then,' replied the merchant. 'We will hunt the worthy doctor up at once, and see what he thinks of your constitution. As we go along, you must tell me from what complaint you are supposed to be suffering.'

Jack cast about him for symptoms, but the only thing he could think of was that his head ached—so he thought his liver must be out of order.

'You might say that I am nervous about myself, and that immediately I begin to feel ill I always see a doctor.'

They left the office and proceeded in the direction Jack had followed on the previous day. It was not plain to him what benefit he would derive from the doctor's house, or even from an interview with that worthy. He, nevertheless, felt that this was the best course to pursue.

When they reached the house, Mr. Tollington rapped sharply upon the door with the brass knocker, and few moments later the

portal which Jack hoped stood between Manuel de Montalva and the outside world was thrown open by an ancient crone of the housekeeper description, who, in answer to the merchant's inquiries, informed them that the doctor was at home. She invited them to enter, and led them to a room at the back of the house. It was a large, sparsely-furnished apartment, in no way remarkable for anything. There was a writing-table, another covered with books, another in the centre of the room, which looked as if it might be used for the purpose of meals, a curious Algerian settee, or, as it might be more properly described perhaps, divan, and a large window looking out upon a bare court-yard.

'Not much of a place,' said the merchant, as he looked round the room. 'It does not speak very well for the doctor's practice.'

As he finished speaking, the door opened, and the little old man, whom Jack had seen on the previous afternoon, entered. He looked from one to the other of his visitors, as if he did not understand who he should address first. Eventually he selected Mr. Tollington, and said something in Spanish. That gentleman replied, and then turned with a low bow to his friend. Jack gathered that an introduc-

tion was taking place, and performed his most polite bow.

Some further conversation ensued, after which, by means of the interpreter, the doctor began to question him concerning his symptoms. These Jack found extremely difficult, as you may suppose, to answer.

In the room above some one was walking impatiently up and down. Jack listened while the other two were talking, and felt that he would have given something to have known who the individual was. It was a firm, manly step, and whoever its owner might be it was quite certain that he was disturbed in his mind.

Having finished his inquiries, the doctor passed to his writing-table and sat down to pen a prescription. That finished, he handed it back to Jack, who inquired, through the merchant, as to what sum he was indebted to him for his attention. This having been satisfactorily arranged, they were about to take their leave when the door opened, and a tall, stalwart man, with a heavy, clean-shaven face, and close-cropped black hair, burst impetuously into the room. The doctor looked up angrily, but the newcomer did not take any notice of his scowling countenance.

'Manuel and I are going out,' he said, in German. 'We shall return in an hour.'

Jack had to turn his face away lest the expression upon it should be observed by the doctor. Inez's brother, then, was in the house, for it was scarcely likely there could be another of the same name there. He found it difficult to conceal his exultation. If they were to return in an hour, he would take good care to be there to meet them. He wanted to see the lad, and be sure that he was not making a mistake.

The medico having grunted some almost unintelligible answer the stranger withdrew, and they saw no more of him. Feeling that it would be impolitic to follow them just then, Jack requested his companion to detain the old gentleman in conversation a few minutes longer. It was a dangerous thing to do, for of course he could not tell whether the doctor was conversant with the English language or not. The expression upon his face, however, was quite serene, and from this fact Jack drew comfort.

For upwards of ten minutes, therefore, they continued to chat, Tollington interpreting whenever Jack made a remark. Then they bade the doctor farewell, and passed out into

the street once more. When they were some distance from the house, Tollington turned to his companion and condoled with him upon the failure of his errand.

'I am far from being cast down at the result,' Jack replied. 'I have learnt as much as I want to know. The young man I am after is in the house, or rather *was*, for I distinctly heard that man, who spoke in German, mention his name. They have gone out for an hour together, and I am going to make it my business to inspect them on their return, in order to make sure that I am not upon the wrong track.'

'But how do you propose to do that?'

'Unfortunately, I cannot very well say,' Jack answered. 'The presence of the man with him would prevent any chance of my going up to speak to him. Between ourselves, the young fellow has a lot of money, and it is pretty well understood that the people hereabouts—I leave you to fill in the blanks—are doing their best to obtain it. Naturally they are not anxious that he should make the acquaintance of strangers. I want to get him away from them and back to his own people.'

'You are playing a very worthy part,' Tol-

lington answered warmly. 'You are a member of the family, I suppose?'

'I hope to marry his sister,' Jack answered, and that seemed to the merchant a perfectly satisfactory reply.

For the next quarter of an hour they were busily occupied in endeavouring to work out some scheme by which they might entice the German from his companion. They were not successful, however.

By this time they had returned to the corner of the street in which the house was situated, and were keeping a sharp lookout for the two men. They had been absent for upwards of an hour, and now, according to the German's promise, it was time for them to return. It was not, however, until another fifteen minutes had elapsed that Jack spied them a hundred yards or so down the street.

'There they are,' he said to his companion, and as he spoke the elder man entered the building before which they were standing.

'Come along as quickly as you can,' cried Jack, in a fever of excitement. 'The German has gone into that house, and I may be in time to obtain an interview with his companion before he comes out.'

He hastened forward at such a speed that

the stout little merchant found it extremely difficult to keep up with him. As they hurried along, Jack implored him to enter the building, whatever it might be (it proved to be a wine-shop), and engage the man in conversation, while he delivered the letter from Inez, and one he had written himself, which he had brought with him. Although his companion did not speak German, he gladly consented to do what he could, and on reaching the door of the wine-shop he hastened into it. Meanwhile Jack had been able to obtain a good view of the younger man's face. There was no need for him to look twice in order to recognise the fact that he was standing beside the original of the portrait he carried in his pocket. He would have known him anywhere, if only from his likeness to his sister. It was a fine face, with curious, deep-set eyes, that were without doubt those of a fanatic. A student of the human countenance would have declared that the youth would follow anything he might take up with a zeal that nothing could destroy.

When Tollington had disappeared into the shop Jack made his way up to the young man.

'Your name is Manuel de Montalva, is it not?' he began.

The other took a step or two back in surprise.

'What makes you say that?' he asked hurriedly, as if he were afraid of passers-by hearing him.

'My name is Trowbridge,' Jack remarked, 'and I have come to you from your sister, who is in England.' As he spoke he produced from his pocket the two letters. 'Look here,' he continued, 'I want you to read these. Your sister is in great distress about you, and I believe I am her only friend. I have travelled as fast as possible from London in order to find you.'

He paused and looked anxiously into the other's face.

'You have come from my sister,' said the young man, very slowly. 'How did she know where to send you?'

'I found out that for myself. Until I told her, she had no idea where you were, upon my honour. Mr. de Montalva, you have not the least notion of her sufferings on your behalf. For Heaven's sake try to believe that I am your friend. I am not going to trespass into your private affairs more than I can help, but whatever it is you are going to do, think of her. Will you read those letters and then communicate with me?'

Jack furnished him with the name of his hotel.

'I will read them,' replied the unhappy young man. 'Does D'Alvaro know that you have come to me?'

He shuddered as he mentioned the name. and then glanced fearfully around as if he were afraid some third party might have heard it.

'No,' Jack answered; 'he knows nothing about it. He is keeping your sister a close prisoner within a few miles from my house, and it was only by the barest chance that I was able to help her. Will you promise that you will read those letters and communicate with me when you have done so?'

'I give you my word,' the young man answered. 'You must not attempt to see me any more, however. I am closely watched. Farewell. If you have been good to my sister then I will add, if you will listen to one so vile as I, may Heaven bless you!'

With a heavy heart Jack left him and walked a few paces down the street, where he was presently joined by Tollington.

'You saw him?' inquired the latter.

'Yes, and handed him the letters concerning which I told you. Now, let us get back to the hotel. You had better lunch with me. I

cannot thank you enough for the kindness you have shown to me.'

They lunched together, and after the meal went into the courtyard of the hotel to smoke. They had scarcely come to the end of their cigars when the manager of the hotel passed them with a scared expression upon his face. In his hand he carried a newspaper fresh from the press. There was a general stir amongst the little group clustered about the yard, and it was evident that something serious had occurred.

'What is the matter?' Jack inquired of his companion, who left him and interrogated the manager.

'Terrible news,' said Tollington, when he returned. 'General y Ribiera has been assassinated at Cordova, and his murderer has shot himself in the street!'

CHAPTER XIII

'Great Scott, man!' cried Tollington, as he saw the look that had suddenly appeared on his companion's face. 'What on earth is the matter? Are you feeling ill?'

'Ill? No, not I,' answered Jack, who felt as if he must be in a dream. 'Tell me again what the news is?'

Tollington regarded him anxiously before he reiterated his tale. There was that in his friend's face which he could not understand.

'I have told you that General y Ribiera, who has just been appointed Minister for War, has been assassinated at Cordova.'

'But is it true? Are you quite sure that it can be relied upon? In Heaven's name do not make any mistake!'

'Hush!' said Tollington, looking anxiously about him. 'You must not talk like that here. You do not know what you are saying. If people heard you they might go as far as to declare that you knew something of the matter.'

'Then they 'd make a big mistake,' answered Jack. Then to himself he added: 'Ribiera dead! I can't believe it. It seems too great a relief. If it is true Manuel is free; Inez's brother is guiltless of one of the greatest crimes of the century!'

He walked a few paces from his companion. As he declared in confidence some time afterwards, he felt as if he were going to make an idiot of himself, though in what way he proposed to do it he did not say.

The effect of the news upon the inhabitants of Madrid was extraordinary. Crowds paraded the streets, and later in the evening it became necessary to call out the military to reinforce the police. The latest news of the tragic story was eagerly devoured, and, strange to relate, no one seemed to pity the dead man.

'This is already known in England,' said Jack to himself, and he wondered what effect it would have upon D'Alvaro. He also wondered what the unhappy young man to whom he had spoken that morning thought of it.

Late that night a letter was brought to him. The servant who handed it to him could not say by whose hand it had come. The envelope was a large one, and it was evident to Jack that it contained another enclosure. He could

guess the identity of the writer before he opened it. When he did so he discovered an envelope sealed and addressed to Inez Montalva, and another with his name upon it. Placing the former in his pocket he opened the latter. It was not a long letter, but Jack thought it the most pitiful he had ever read.

'By this time,' said the writer, 'you must have heard the news. How much you know I cannot tell, nor can it interest me. To-night I leave Madrid, and after to-morrow the world and I will know each other no more. I am entering a religious house, a thing which I should have done some years ago had it been possible. I enclose a letter for my sister, which I beg you will give her. For the future let her regard me as a dead man, as I should have been in a few days' time had not something quite unforeseen taken place. She has told me of the kindness you have shown her. I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Bear in mind that, from this moment, Inez is free! D'Alvaro dares not detain her. Heaven grant her happiness! Pray for me.'

There was no signature, and there was no need for one.

And so, after all the storm and stress of his young life, Manuel had decided to enter a

religious house. Jack felt in his heart of hearts that he could not have done better. Without doubt, he had come perilously near the perpetration of a great crime, and Providence, in the shape of a miserable wretch, who, so it appeared later, was not in his right senses, and therefore could not be held accountable for the act, had stepped in at the last moment and had saved him. Whatever other people's opinion may be—and Jack has his—mine is, that young Manuel never intended to commit the crime, but that he would have taken his own life first. I know his sister, and it may be that I am a prejudiced judge, but I think not.

. . . . . .

L'ENVOI

How Jack reached England, I am of opinion he could not tell you. By the time he arrived at Paris he felt that he had been half-way round the world, and I have heard it said that when he found that the Calais boat was not likely to run up to time on account of the rough sea in the English Channel, his language was not at all what might have been expected from the churchwarden of his parish. Eventually he arrived in London, where, owing to the lateness of the hour, he was compelled to pass

the night. For some time he had serious thoughts of chartering a special train down to Great Brackford, but he realised that even if he did so it would not be possible for him to see Inez any sooner. He accordingly went down by the early morning express.

Beautiful as was France, and fair as he had found old Spain, he experienced inexpressible delight in the charming English country through which he was so quickly passing. Every mile, he told himself, that the engine dropped behind it was bringing him closer to the woman he had learned to love so fondly. On his arrival at Great Brackford he found the dogcart for which he had telegraphed awaiting his coming. His groom touched his hat, and informed him in reply to his inquiries that Miss Dorothy was quite well, that the grey mare was no longer lame, and that the pointer, Topsy, had a fine litter of pups, which promised to be as good as their father and mother.

Jack took his seat and was soon bowling along on his homeward way. He passed through the town, and crossed the bridge near which the road branched off to the Castle. He was just approaching the road in question, when he became aware of a carriage which had

turned the corner and was coming towards him at a rapid rate. Very much to his surprise, as it drew nearer, he made out the tall form of the superintendent of police upon the box. He held up his hand that he intended to stop, and the driver immediately pulled up. Jack did likewise, and his groom alighted and went to the horse's head. Then Jack descended and walked to the footpath where the superintendent was awaiting his coming.

'Good-morning, Mr. Goodthought,' he said. 'I had intended stopping at the station on my way through to hear if you have heard anything concerning my friend, Mr. Ormby, but I was in a hurry to get home. May I ask if you have had any success?'

'Lor' bless you, sir, haven't you heard the news?' the officer replied.

'I have heard nothing at all,' Jack answered. 'What has happened?'

'Just take a glance into that cab, sir,' said the man, 'and I think you will see something you didn't expect to see there.'

Jack looked and, to his surprise, saw D'Alvaro and the German keeper sitting beside two men whom he did not recognise.

'Why, surely that is my tenant,' he said, 'Monsieur d'Alvaro, at the Castle?'

'Yes, sir, your tenant, and one of the most notorious Anarchists in Europe. Those gentlemen with him are Scotland Yard detectives, and they have just arrested him and his confederate. It appears that there is an extradition warrant out against them by the French police, and they will probably be brought up at Bow Street to-morrow morning, There were two or three others they wanted to catch at the Castle, but somehow or another they 've made their escape.'

'This is extraordinary intelligence,' Jack remarked, feeling that he must say something. 'But what about Mr. Ormby?'

'Bless you, sir, Mr. Ormby was found at the Castle,' returned the other. 'While we 've been looking for him all round the countryside, he 's been kept locked up by this Mr. Carlitz, or, as he calls himself down here, D'Alvaro.'

'And the young lady who is supposed to be his ward?' Jack inquired, with a little falter in his voice. 'What has become of her?'

'Well, it appears, sir, that she went away with Mr. Ormby, and I think they are at your house now. A sweet, pretty young thing——'

Much to the officer's astonishment Jack waited to hear no more, but made for his dog-cart, and mounting to the box-seat drove off

down the road at a pace that should have got him into considerable trouble had the police been doing their duty. He scarcely waited for the gates to be opened before he was rattling up the drive, and so fast had his groom to run that, had he not been an exceptionally good sprinter, he would not have been in time to take the horse to the stables before his master had entered the house. Ere he had rung the bell Dot was on the doorstep, with Jim, looking just the same as ever, beside her. Of Inez he saw nothing.

'Oh, Jack, you don't know how glad I am to see you,' said his sister, as he kissed her. 'We've been through so much to-day, and I'm the happiest girl in England.'

Then she broke down completely and retired into the drawing-room, leaving her brother free to shake hands with his friend. This he did until it seemed as if their wrists must snap. I fancy neither of them had known how fond they were of each other until that moment. Then Jack made his way into the drawing-room in search of his sister.

'Dot,' he said, 'where is Inez?'

'Upstairs,' Dot replied. 'Poor girl, she has been through a great deal, and I persuaded her to go and lie down for a while. She does

not know of your arrival, or you may be sure she would have been down to help receive you.'

She had scarcely finished speaking before the door opened and Inez herself entered the room. On seeing Jack she gave a little cry of astonishment, and her face turned deadly white, as if she feared what news she might receive. Dot went forward and placed her arm round her waist and kissed her. Then she left the room, so that they might be alone together. When the door had closed behind her, Inez took a step forward. Her lips trembled, and her beautiful eyes filled with tears as she put the question.

'What news — what news have you for me?'

Jack took her hand and led her to a seat. 'Sit down,' he said, 'and I will tell you. The news I bring you is good or bad as you may consider it. For my part, I am convinced that you will deem it good. Heaven knows, it might have been much worse.'

'Then you found my brother? Oh, tell me about him! You cannot dream how I hunger for your intelligence.'

Thereupon Jack set to work and told her everything just as it had occurred. He did

not even hide from her the name of the man whom he had the best of reasons for believing poor Manuel had been deputed to kill.

'So you see,' he said, in conclusion, 'your brother was saved, though I cannot think for a moment that he would have committed the deed.'

Then he handed her the letter which had been entrusted to his care.

'Let Dorothy take you to your room,' said Jack, 'and you can read it there in peace. Afterwards we can talk it over, and then I am ready to act as you may wish me to do.'

He went to the door and called his sister, and when she came requested her to conduct Inez to her room. They went upstairs together, and presently Dot returned with the intelligence that Inez preferred to be alone for a time.

'And now, where is Jim?' Jack inquired. 'I must see him and hear his story. You are happy, little woman?'

She looked at him with a light he had never seen in her eyes before.

'Happy?' she cried. 'How could I be anything else? I thought he was dead, and he has been given back to me. I think I am the happiest woman on earth to-day!'

'Then kindly go and bring that lover of

yours to me,' said her brother, opening the door for her. 'I am anxious to have another look at him.'

She left the room to return a few moments later with Jim Ormby.

'Jim, Jim!' said Jack, as the pair seated themselves on a settee opposite him. 'You don't know what trouble and misery you have caused me. For mercy's sake tell me what it all means! For my part I can make neither head nor tail of it.'

'Unfortunately I can,' the other replied, 'and I've had to pay for my experience. There isn't very much to tell, but what there is I'll make a clean breast of. You may remember that when we left the 'Varsity I went abroad, and pottered about Europe for a couple of years. Six months of that time I spent in St. Petersburg, and another three in Moscow. In the former place, I ran across a man named Carlitz, who, I understand, is the individual you know as D'Alvaro. I was warned against him, as it was said that he was a well-known conspirator, and a member of I don't know how many secret societies. But I had taken rather a fancy to the fellow, perhaps on account of his curious ideas, and I did not feel inclined to give him the cold shoulder.

When I met him again in Moscow he tried to convert me to his own way of thinking, and I fancy told me a little more than he intended to do. After that I heard that he had suffered a term of imprisonment in an Austrian gaol. On the night that I dined here and proposed to Dot, I drove home. You had told me that you had let the Castle, but I had no idea that your tenant was my old Russian acquaintance. You may imagine my surprise, therefore, when, just before I reached my own gates, I saw Carlitz step out of the shadow and look up at me. He asked if he might speak to me for a few moments, and I accordingly descended from the cart and bade my groom take it home. Then we walked down the road together. We had reached the small clump of trees by the pond, and Carlitz was in the act of describing to me his sufferings in the Austrian prison, when something was clapped over my head, my arms were seized, and I found myself a prisoner, incapable of doing anything to help myself. Presently I was picked up and placed in some sort of vehicle which carried me off—in which direction I couldn't say. When I was released again I found to my amazement that I was in a room in your house, or perhaps, I should say in

the Castle. The windows were securely barred, and I found that escape was impossible. In spite of my surprise, I could instantly understand the reason of it all. There could be no doubt that Carlitz had seen me somewhere on the day of his arrival—as a matter of fact I had been into town—he must have felt assured in his own mind that I should give information to the police, for we had had a desperate quarrel at our last meeting. He therefore planned and carried out a scheme for trapping me. I didn't know what you would think of me, and I could very well imagine the agonies Dot would suffer. However, here I am now, as jolly as a sand-boy, while Carlitz and his chief lieutenant are on their way to receive their deserts.'

Inez did not make her appearance at lunch, but later in the afternoon she sent word by Dot that she would see Jack, if he would come up to his sister's sitting-room.

'Be gentle with her,' said Dot, as they approached the room together, 'for she is very sad at heart. I do not know what is the matter with her, but you do. And, Jack' —here she sank her voice to a whisper—'I really believe that you are the only person in the world who can comfort her.'

Jack did not reply to her, but made his way down the corridor towards the sitting-room. He opened the door softly and looked inside. Inez was seated at the further end of the room, but immediately she saw him she rose.

'I wanted to see you,' she began, almost diffidently. 'You know what my brother has done. Will you read his letter?'

Jack paused for a moment.

'Do you wish me to do so?' he asked.

'I would rather you did,' she said. 'I should not wish you to misjudge him. Poor boy, he only acted according to his light.'

She handed him the letter and he took it to the window and read it. It was a sad epistle and touched him to the heart. Reading between the lines he could see that the young fellow really believed in the standard he had set up for himself. He did not speak of the terrible mission that had been entrusted to him, but threw out certain inferences that were unmistakable. He spoke about his future and the fate he had chosen for himself.

'Had I been given my choice,' he averred again, 'in years gone by, I should have taken the vows I am now taking, and I should then have known nothing of the misery I am now experiencing.'

Jack turned the page and was about to continue his reading when she stopped him and bade him give her the letter.

'Why will you not let me see it?' he inquired.

'I beg that you will give me the letter,' she entreated. And without another word he handed it to her.

The same silence that had fallen upon them before in the grotto now took possession of them. Then Jack took off the ring she had given him and handed it to her.

'I promised to return you this,' he said, 'when I should have found your brother.'

'You will not keep it?' and her voice trembled as she put the question.

'Only on one consideration,' he answered.

'And what is that?'

'That you will allow me to replace it with another. Inez, you know that I love you! I have tried to prove it. Will you be my wife?'

'Yours or no other man's!' she whispered.

. . . .

Carlitz, *alias* D'Alvaro, and his first lieutenant were extradited by the Russian police, and are now doing a life-sentence in the mines of Siberia. I have not heard of any one who

regretted their fate, though it is possible they may have friends somewhere.

Manuel de Montalva met his death in a most heroic way, after nursing a case of diphtheria, within a year of his entering the monastery. It is said that he was beloved by all from the Father Superior downwards.

But to return to happier topics. Jack and Inez are now living at the Castle, and next week I go down to stand as godfather at their son and heir's christening. Jim Ormby and Dot live at the Croft, and both houses are said to contain the happiest couples in England. As a confirmed old bachelor I, of course, don't believe it, but as you, my gentle reader, will probably observe, that is neither here nor there.

THE END

Edinburgh: Printed by T. and A. Constable.

Foreign and Colonial Agents—*continued*

TASMANIA—
Hobart: J. Walch & Sons; T. L. Hood; W. R. Propsting.
Launceston: A. W. Birchall & Sons; A. W. Mayhead.

FIJI ISLANDS—
Suva: G. L. Griffiths; Tate & Co.
Levuka: Fiji Colonist Office.

HAWAIIAN ISLANDS—
Honolulu: Hawaiian News Co.; Walls-Nicholls Co.; G. T. Thrums.

SOUTH AFRICA—
Barberton: A. W. Bayly & Co.
Bloemfontein: Barlow Bros. & Co.; Deale Bros.; W. A. Wright; C. Borckenhagen & Co.
Cape Town: J. C. Juta & Co.; T. M. Miller; Gordon & Gotch; Darter Bros. & Walton; Solomon & Wilson; R. A. Thompson & Co., Ltd.; W. P. Buchanan; E. P. Kitch & Co.; J. H. Robinson; Argus Publishing Co.
Cradock: Butler Bros.
East London: Grocott & Sherry; W. Savage & Sons; F. Howe & Co.; F. Hebbes & Co.; J. C. Juta & Co.
Grahamstown: Grocott & Sherry; J. C. Juta & Co.; Jackson Bros.
Johannesburg: J. C. Juta & Co.; P. Davis & Sons; Grocott & Sherry; Argus Publishing Co.; Central News Agency.
Kimberley: Godlonton & Co.; L. Simmons; S. C. Hawthorne.
King William's Town: J. C. Juta & Co.; W. Savage & Sons.
Kroonstad: Central News Agency.
Paarl: T. M. Miller.
Port Elizabeth: J. C. Juta & Co.; P. Davis & Sons; Jackson Bros.
Pretoria: J. Keith; Argus Publishing Co.; Central News Agency; T. M. Miller.
Queenstown: E. W. Welsh.
Stellensbosch: J. C. Juta & Co.; Darter Bros. & Walton.
Vryburg: Townshend & Son.

NATAL—Government Railway Bookstalls.
Durban: P. Davis & Sons; Gordon & Gotch; W. S. Woodroffe; Isaacs & Co.; Adams & Co.; C. W. Tomkins; Jackson Bros.
Maritzburg: P. Davis & Sons; Adams & Co.

RHODESIA—
Bulawayo: J. C. Juta & Co.; T. M. Miller; H. & A. Lyons; Argus Publishing Co.
Salisbury: Argus Publishing Co.
Umtali: Argus Publishing Co.

EAST AFRICA—
Beira: I. D. Martini.
Lourenço Marques: A. W. Bayly & Co.

WEST AFRICA—
Sierra Leone: T. J. Sawyerr; J. C. Thomas; J. C. May.
Gambia-Bathurst: Edmund Thomas.
Gold Coast—Accra: Gold Coast Chronicle Office.

INDIA—A. H. Wheeler & Co., General Agents for G. Bell & Sons.
Aden: Cowasjee, Dinshaw & Co.; Arnold, Cheney & Co.; Bardey & Co.; W. H. Lockerman.
Agra: R. D. Chattree & Co.
Ahmedabad: Panagi Girdhar; Gujrat Book Depôt.
Allahabad: A. H. Wheeler & Co.; G. Montague & Bros.; Ram Narain Lal.
Bangalore: Higginbotham & Co.; M. Chidambaramier.
Baroda: Gujrat Book Depôt.
Bombay: A. H. Wheeler & Co.; Thacker & Co., Ltd.; A. J. Combridge & Co.; S. L. Norman & Co.; Radhabai Atmaram Sagoon; Gopal Narayen & Co.; Sunder Pandurang; D. V. Sadhale & Co.; D. B. Taraporevala & Co.; Furtado & Bro.; K. B. G. M. Munshi & Co.; B. S. Vaidya & Co.; Army & Navy Co-operative Society, Ltd.; D. Lukhmidass & Co.; Ramchandra, Govind & Son.
Broach: D. D. Dalal & Co.
Calcutta: A. H. Wheeler & Co.; Thacker, Spink & Co.; School Book Society; Newman & Co.; S. C. Auddy & Co.; S. K. Lahiri & Co.; P. Banerjee & Co.; Bose Bros.; A. K. Chatterjee & Co.; Sree Nath Paun & Co.; J. C. Banerji; M. M. Majumdar; Dey Bros.; Rossomov Soor & Co.; Suria Kiomar Nath.
Karachi: Bianchi, King & Co.
Lahore: Munshi Gulab Singh: Attar Chand, Delal & Co.; Attar Chand, Kapur & Co.
Lucknow: The Bhargava Book Depôt.
Madras: Higginbotham & Co.; V. Kalyanaram Iyer & Co.; Srinivasa Varadachari & Co.; Vest & Co.; Arbuthnot & Co.; A. J. Combridge & Co.
Poona: Shiralkar & Co.; Religious Book Depôt.
Simla: Thacker, Spink & Co.
Burmah—Rangoon: British Burmah Press; Myles Standish & Co.; Smart & Mookerdum.
Ceylon—Colombo: Cave & Co.; H. S. King & Co.; Bianchi, King & Co.; Darley & Butler; C. M. S. Wappoo Marickar; Wijayaratna & Co.; Lockwood Bros.; A. B. L. J. L. Marickar.
Jaffna: K. Sivasuppramaniyam.
Nuwara Eliya: Cargills, Limited.

SIAM—
Bangkok: Kiam Hoa Heng & Co.

CHINA AND JAPAN—
Hongkong: Kelly & Walsh; W. Brewer & Co.; Tsui Man Kok.
Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh; W. H. Brewer.
Kobe—Hyogo: Kelly & Walsh.
Tokio & Osaka: Z. P. Maruya & Co.
Yokohama: Z. P. Maruya & Co.; Kelly & Walsh: F. Kingsell & Co.

STRAITS SETTLEMENTS—
Penang: Jas. L. Woodford; Pritchard & Co.
Singapore: Kelly & Walsh; J. Little & Co., Ltd.

BELL'S INDIAN AND COLONIAL LIBRARY

Issued for Circulation in India and the Colonies only

PAPER COVERS, 2*s.* 6*d.* EACH; CLOTH, 3*s.* 6*d.* EACH

VOLUMES ALREADY ISSUED

The Numbers missing are Out of Print

1. **Ships that Pass in the Night.** Beatrice Harraden
2. **An Egyptian Princess.** Georg Ebers
3. **Tess of the D'Urbervilles.** Thomas Hardy
6. **Arne, and the Fisher Lassie.** Björnstjerne Bjornson
7. **The Star-Gazers.** G. Manville Fenn
8. **For Honour and Life.** William Westall
10. **Waterloo.** With Maps and Plans. George Hooper
12. **The Evils of Popular Ignorance.** John Foster
13. **Table-Talk and Omniana.** S. T. Coleridge
14. **Verses and Fly-leaves.** C. S. Calverley
15. **With Edged Tools.** Henry Seton Merriman (Not supplied to Canada)
17. **Pembroke.** Mary E. Wilkins
20. **The White Company.** A. Conan Doyle
23. **Essays and Lectures.** R. W. Emerson
24. **English Traits and Nature.** R. W. Emerson
49. **Tempest Torn.** Lieut.-Col. A. Haggard
52. **Prose Tales.** A. Poushkin
57. **Lord Ormont and his Aminta.** George Meredith
59. **A Man of His Word.** Arthur Paterson
61. **A Daughter of the Soil.** M. E. Francis
65. **Trilby.** *Illus.* George du Maurier (Not supplied to Canada)
70. **Lord Stirling's Son.** A. H. Marshall
75a. **Alexia.** Eleanor C. Price
83. **Doctor Gray's Quest.** Francis Underwood
91. **The Men of the Moss-Hags.** S. R. Crockett (Not supplied to Canada)
93. **Lot 13.** Dorothea Gerard
96. **A Woman of the Commune.** G. A. Henty
97. **A Hard Woman.** Violet Hunt
101. **The Heart of Life.** W. H. Mallock
103. **The Way of a Maid.** Katharine Tynan
104. **French Men and French Manners.** A. D. Vandam
107. **Comedies of Courtship.** Anthony Hope
110. **Bootle's Children and other Tales.** John Strange Winter
120. **Madelon.** Mary E. Wilkins
121. **A Fool of Nature.** Julian Hawthorne
127. **The Truthtellers.** J. S. Winter
135. **Crown and Anchor.** John C. Hutcheson
139. **Half a Hero.** Anthony Hope
141. **Limitations.** E. F. Benson
142. **Tomalyn's Quest.** G. B. Burgin
143. **Rodney Stone.** *Illus.* A. Conan Doyle
149. **Marm Liza.** K. Douglas Wiggin
150. **The Way of Marriage.** Violet Hunt
156. **The Pirate Junk.** J. C. Hutcheson
161. **Christine of the Hills.** Max Pemberton
168. **Uncle Bernac.** *Illus.* A. Conan Doyle
173. **An African Millionaire.** *Illus.* Grant Allen
180. **The Martian.** *Illus.* George du Maurier (Not supplied to Canada)
181. **Lady Mary's Experiences.** Mrs. Jocelyn
182. **Another's Burden.** James Payn
183. **Valdar the Oft-Born.** George Griffith
186. **The Final War.** *Illus.* Louis Tracy
188. **Whoso Findeth a Wife.** William Le Queux
189. **Perpetua.** S. Baring-Gould
190. **The Gray Lady.** *Illus.* Henry Seton Merriman (Not supplied to Canada)
191. **H.R.H.'s Love Affair.** J. Maclaren Cobban
197. **Miss Providence.** Dorothea Gerard
198. **Deeds that Won the Empire.** *Illus.* W. H. Fitchett
199. **Real Ghost Stories.** W. T. Stead
200. **Poor Little Bella!** F. C. Philips
201. **At the Tail of the Hounds.** Mrs. E. L. Kennard
203. **High Play.** G. Manville Fenn
204. **The Tragedy of the Korosko.** *Illus.* A. Conan Doyle
205. **The Great Stone of Sardis.** *Illus.* Frank R. Stockton (Not supplied to Canada)
210. **The Incidental Bishop.** Grant Allen
211. **Deborah of Tod's.** Mrs. H. de la Pasture
215. **Scribes and Pharisees.** William Le Queux
216. **The Virgin of the Sun.** George Griffith
220. **The Lost Laird.** J. E. Muddock
223. **Penelope's Experiences in Scotland.** Kate Douglas Wiggin. *Illus.*
225. **Miss Rayburne's Diamonds.** Mrs. R. Jocelyn
228. **Lost Man's Lane.** Mrs. Anna K. Green
229. **The Wheel of Gold.** George Egerton

[*Continued at end*

231. **Silence and other Stories.** Mary E. Wilkins
232. **The Ape, the Idiot, and other People.** W. C. Morrow
234. **Meg of the Scarlet Foot.** W. E. Tirebuck
235. **The Ways of a Widow.** Mrs. Lovett Cameron
236. **If Sinners Entice Thee.** William Le Queux
237. **The Love Story of Margaret Wynne.** Adeline Sergeant
238. **Bam Wildfire.** Helen Mathers
239. **The Destined Maid.** *Illus.* George Griffith
240. **Children of the Mist.** Eden Phillpotts
241. **Heart and Sword.** John Strange Winter
243. **The Phantom Army.** Max Pemberton
244. **Adventures of Captain Kettle.** C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne
245. **Lost Provinces.** *Illus.* Louis Tracy
246. **Paving the Way.** *Illus.* S. Newland
247. **Father Anthony.** Robert Buchanan
248. **Fights for the Flag.** W. H. Fitchett
249. **The Cost of Her Pride.** Mrs. Alexander
250. **Jason Edwards.** Hamblin Garland
252. **Stories in Light and Shadow.** Bret Harte
253. **Her Wild Oats.** John Bickerdyke
254. **The Rip's Redemption.** E. Livingston Prescott
255. **Settled out of Court.** G. B. Burgin
256. **The Archdeacon.** L. B. Walford
257. **Pathway of the Gods.** Mona Caird
258. **Associate Hermits.** F. R. Stockton (Not supplied to Canada)
259. **The Measure of a Man** E. Livingston Prescott
260. **Moonfleet.** J. Meade Falkner
261. **The Rainbow Feather.** Fergus Hume
263. **A Fair Fraud.** Mrs. Lovett Cameron
264. **Hermits of Gray's Inn.** G. B. Burgin
265. **Knaves of Diamonds.** George Griffith
266. **The Spies of the Wight.** Headon Hill
267. **Francois the Valet.** G. W. Appleton
268. **The Vibart Affair.** G. Manville Fenn
269. **Many Ways of Love.** F. Wishaw
270. **England's Peril.** William Le Queux
271. **The Great Pirate Syndicate.** George Griffith
272. **The Individualist.** W. H. Mallock
273. **When the Sleeper Wakes.** H. G. Wells
274. **In the King's Favour.** J. E. Muddock
275. **The White Woman.** W. E. Tirebuck
276. **Bonnie Maggie Lauder.** Alan St. Aubyn
277. **A Florida Enchantment.** A. C. Gunter
278. **Henry Massinger.** Mrs. R. Jocelyn
279. **In Full Cry.** Richard Marsh
280. **Pride and Prejudice.** *Illus.* by Hugh Thomson. Jane Austen
281. **The Honour of Vivien Bruce.** Mrs. J. H. Needell
282. **The Bond of Black.** William Le Queux
283. **A Name to Conjure with.** J. Strange Winter
284. **The Rose of Judah.** George Griffith
285. **Blake of Oriel.** Adeline Sergeant
286. **A Legacy of Hate.** Theo. Douglas
287. **The Stepmother.** Mrs. Alexander
288. **Further Adventures of Captain Kettle.** C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne
289. **Illusion.** E. Livingston Prescott
290. **Adam Grigson.** Mrs. H. De la Pasture
291. **Brothers of the Chain.** George Griffith
292. **The Desire of Men.** Mrs. L. T. Meade
293. **Signors of the Night.** Max Pemberton
294. **Jack Hamlin's Mediation and other Stories.** Bret Harte
[illegible]. **The Red Men of the Dusk.** John Finnemore
[illegible]. **A Lowly Lover.** Florence Warden
298. **The Revenge of Valerie.** Hume Nisbet
299. **Tales of Time and Space.** H. G. Wells
300. **Ford's Folly, Ltd.** Major Arthur Griffiths
301. **The Red-Headed Man.** Fergus Hume
302. **The Wooing of Monica.** Mrs. L. T. Meade
303. **A Voyage at Anchor.** W. Clark Russell
304. **A Rise in the World.** Adeline Sergeant
305. **The Priest's Marriage.** Nora Vynne
306. **In Old New York.** Wilson Barrett and Elwyn Barron
307. **Wiles of the Wicked.** William Le Queux
308. **A Torn-Out Page.** Dora Russell
309. **Nemo.** Theo. Douglas
310. **The Chicamon Stone.** C. Phillipps-Wolley
311. **The Gentleman Pensioner.** Albert Lee
312. **The Natal Campaign.** *Illus.* Bennet Burleigh
313. **The Green Flag and other Stories.** A. Conan Doyle (Not supplied to Canada)
314. **The Tiger's Claw.** G. B. Burgin
315. **The Seafarers.** J. Bloundelle-Burton
316. **The Empire Makers.** Hume Nisbet
317. **Marcelle of the Latin Quarter.** Clive Holland
318. **The Plain Miss Cray.** Florence Warden
319. **The Vanishing of Tera.** Fergus Hume
320. **Fast and Loose.** Major Arthur Griffiths
321. **The Siege of Ladysmith.** R. J. McHugh
323-6. **How England Saved Europe.** 4 vols. *Illus.* W. H. Fitchett, LL.D
327. **My Diocese During the War.** *Illus.* Rt. Rev. Lord Bishop of Natal
328. **At the Sign of the Cross Keys.** Paul Creswick
329. **From Sandhill to Pine.** Bret Harte
330. **Where the Shoe Pinches.** Mrs. L. T. Meade and Clifford Halifax, M.D.
331. **Love and Mr. Lewisham.** H. G. Wells
332. **Footfall of Fate.** Mrs. J. H. Riddell
333. **Daunay's Tower.** Adeline Sergeant
334. **The Goddess.** Richard Marsh
335. **The Flower of the Flock.** W. E. Norris (Not supplied to Canada)
336. **An Eye for an Eye.** William Le Queux
337. **The Married Miss Binks.** J. S. Winter
338. **For Right and England.** Hume Nisbet
339. **Town Lady and Country Lass.** Florence Warden
340. **Mis'ess Joy.** John le Breton
341. **Blood Tracks of the Bush.** Simpson Newland
342. **A Prick of Conscience.** Alan St. Aubyn
343. **Brand of the Broad Arrow.** Major Arthur Griffiths
344. **The Autobiography of a Charwoman.** Annie Wakeman
345. **Joan Brotherhood.** Bernard Capes

346. **The Woman of Death.** *Illus.* Guy Boothby
347. **A Breaker of Laws.** W. Pett Ridge
348. **The Princess of Copper.** A. Clavering Gunter
349. **The Great Boer War.** A. Conan Doyle (Not supplied to Canada)
350. **The Half-Hearted.** John Buchan
351. **A Self Made Countess.** J. S. Winter
352. **God's Lad.** Paul Cushing
353. **In White Raiment.** William le Queux
353a. **Ellen Terry and her Impersonations.** Charles Hiatt
354. **The Thin Red Line.** Major Arthur Griffiths
355. **Kate Cameron of Brux.** J. E. Muddock
356. **The Justice of Revenge.** George Griffith
357. **A Cabinet Secret.** Guy Boothby
358. **Wellington's Men.** W. H. Fitchett, LL.D.
359. **War—and Arcadia.** Bertram Mitford
360. **An Aristocratic Detective.** Richard Marsh
361. **Brought to Bay.** R. H. Savage
362. **A Great Temptation.** Dora Russell
363. **Four Red Night Caps.** Author of the "Adventures of Captain Kettle"
364. **The Invaders.** *Illus.* Louis Tracey
365. **Miss Cleveland's Companion.** Adeline Sergeant
366. **A Bicycle of Cathay.** *Illus.* Frank R. Stockton (Not supplied to Can
367. **Street Dust and other Stories**
369. **May Silver.** Alan St. Aubyn
370. **The Baron's Sons.** Maurus Jókai (Not supplied to Canada)
371. **A Honeymoon in Space.** G. Griffith
372. **'Twixt Devil and Deep Sea.** Mrs. C. N. Williamson
373. **Madame Bohemia.** Francis Neilson
376. **The Mystery of the Clasped Hands.** Guy Boothby
377. **The Golden Tooth.** J. Maclaren Cobban
378. **The Career of a Beauty.** John Strange Winter
380. **The Midnight Passenger.** R. H. Savage
382. **Cinders.** Helen Mathers
383. **Denver's Double.** George Griffith
384. **Penelope's Irish Experiences.** Kate Douglas Wiggin
385. **The Joss** Richard Marsh
386. **Our Friend the Charlatan.** George Gissing
387. **A Crafty Foe.** Hume Nisbet
388. **Catherine of Calais.** Mrs. H. De la Pasture
389. **Ever Mohun.** Fred T. Jane
390. **Great Battles of the World.** Stephen Crane
391. **A Millionaire's Love Story.** Guy Boothby
392. **Whose was the Hand?** J. E. Muddock
393. **The Fly-Wheel.** George Wemyss
394. **A House with a History.** Florence Warden
395. **Monsieur Lecoq.** *Illus.* Emile Gaboriau
396. **The King's Secret.** R. H. Savage
397. **Don or Devil.** William Westa
398. **The Strange Disappearance of Lady Delia.** Louis Tracy
399. **The Court of Honour.** William Le Queux
400. **A Sack of Shakings.** F. T. Bullen
401. **No. 99 and Blue Blood.** Major Arthur Griffiths
402. **The Man I Loved.** John Strange Winter
403. **Victoria, R.I., Her Life and Empire.** The Duke of Argyll, K.T.
404. **The Widow Lerouge.** *Illus.* Emile Gaboriau
405. **The Crime of the Crystal.** Fergus Hume
406. **Manasseh.** Maurus Jókai (Not supplied to Canada)
407. **A Losing Game.** Hume Nisbet
408. **Penelope's English Experiences.** *Illus.* Kate Douglas Wiggin
409. **King Fritz's A.D.C.** Frank Hird
410. **First Men in the Moon.** H. G. Wells
411. **In the House of his Friends.** Richard Henry Savage
412. **The Tale of the Great Mutiny.** W. H. Fitchett, LL.D.
413. **A Manufacturer's Daughter.** A. C. Gunter (Not supplied to Canada)
414. **The Winds of Cathrigg.** Christabel Coleridge
415. **Tregarthen's Wife.** Fred. M. White
416. **Lord Roberts, A Biography.** Violet Brooke-Hunt
417. **The House with the Green Shutters.** George Douglas
418. **A Matter of Sentiment.** John Strange Winter
419. **The House Divided.** H. B. Marriott Watson (Not supplied to Canada)
420. **The Portion of Labour.** Mary E. Wilkins (Not supplied to Canada)
421. **Jim the Penman.** Dick Donovan
422. **The Curse of the Snake.** Guy Boothby
423. **The Mystery of a Shipyard.** R. H. Savage
424. **A Dream of Freedom.** Hume Nisbet
425. **Deacon and Actress.** A. C. Gunter
426. **A Bid for Empire.** Major A. Griffiths
427. **The Lover Fugitives.** John Finnemore
428. **The Theft of a Heart** L. C. Davidson
429. **Bonds of Steel.** J. S. Fletcher
430. **The Missionary.** G. Griffith
431. **The Pagan's Cup.** Fergus Hume
432. **The Childerbridge Mystery.** Guy Boothby
433. **Last Words.** Stephen Crane
434. **At Sunwich Port.** W. W. Jacobs
435. **Ludus Amoris.** Benjamin Swift
436. **When Love Flies out o' the Window** Leonard Merrick
437. **On the Old Trail.** Bret Harte
438. **A Duchess in Difficulties.** Major A. Griffiths
439. **A Blaze of Glory.** John Strange Winter
440. **My Lord Winchenden.** Graham Hope
441. **The Scarlet Lady.** Alan St. Aubyn
442. **Between the Dark and the Daylight.** Richard Marsh